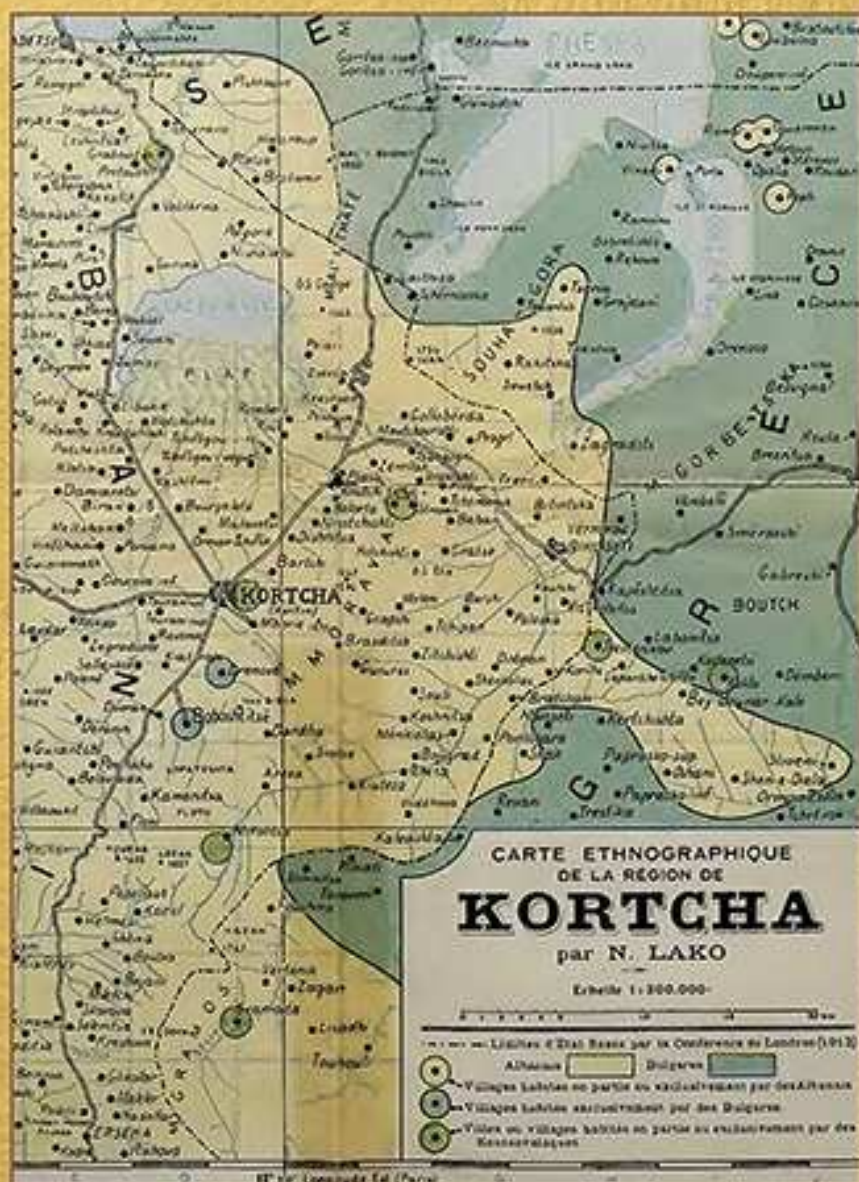




Spas Tashev

# BULGARIANS IN ALBANIA

## THE LONG PATH TO RECOGNITION



SPAS TASHEV

# BULGARIANS IN ALBANIA

THE LONG PATH TO  
RECOGNITION

Peer reviewers:

*Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ventsislav Evtimov Muchinov*

*Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ana Ivanova Kocheva*

*Prof. D.Sc. Veselin Hristov Tsankov*

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**SPAS TASHEV**



**BULGARIANS IN ALBANIA**

**THE LONG PATH TO**

**RECOGNITION**



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2020

This research follows the political processes and their influence over the ethno-demographic development of the Bulgarian community in Albania from 1913 to present day.

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## A FEW WORDS TO THE READERS

On October 12th, 2017, the parliament of the Republic of Albania passed a law that granted the status of a national minority to the Bulgarian community in relation to its national legislation. This historic breakthrough became possible thanks to the joint efforts of the Prime Minister Boyko Borisov, MEPs, the government, the National Assembly, scholars and researchers, Bulgarian organizations and all the friends of Bulgaria and the Bulgarian community in the Republic of Albania. The recommendation of the European Parliament to Albania that „the rights of the people of ethnic Bulgarian descent in the regions of Prespa, Gollobordë, and Gora should be included in the country’s legislation and guaranteed in practice“ played a key role in this process. All this shows that European integration is the only way to solve the historic problems in our region. This was the first serious step towards restoring justice and truth with regards to this population, that has not had the opportunity to enjoy ethnic rights for more than a 100 years.

In light of these events, the publication of Associate Professor Dr. Spas Tashev’s book is of great timing and will surely peak the interest not only of the many readers in Bulgaria interested in this subject, but also of the international audience. By presenting various statistical data and researching the ethno-demographic processes in more than 30 settlements in Albania, in which primarily people of Bulgarian descent live, whose maternal language is an archaic Bulgarian dialect, the author practically disarms those boosting the idea and pushing the policy of the Macedonization of those Bulgarians, most of whom practise Islam.

Before proceeding to the core of his exposition, Associate Professor Dr. Spas Tashev introduces us to the life of the Bulgarians in these lands from the Middle Ages and through the Bulgarian National Revival and their participation in a number of public processes. Many of our fellow Bulgarians there took an active part in the Albanian national liberation movement and contributed to the achievement of Albanian independence in 1913.

In his analysis of the ethno-demographic processes in Albania between the First and the Second World Wars, and throughout the communist era, a number of political factors affecting the fate of the Bulgarians stand out. Special attention is paid to the policy of the Bulgarian state and Bulgarian institutions regarding this population. At the Second Balkan Confer-



ence that took place in 1932, some serious progress was achieved in the relations between Bulgaria and Albania. In the final protocol of the forum, it was written in Article 1 that „the existence of a Bulgarian minority in Albania is recognized“. But as the last leader of the liberation movement of Bulgarians in Macedonia, Ivan Mihaylov, wrote in his memoirs, Yugoslavia and Greece put strong pressure on the government of Albania not to apply the decisions made during the conference, especially the part in which recognized the Bulgarian minority in the country. At the same time, Yugoslavia published „scientific“ works by Serbian authors, who claimed that Bulgarian Muslims in Gollubordë are actually Serbian Muslims, describing them as „our own blood in Southern Serbia“; the region is described as a „Serbian precinct“.

Arguments unknown to the wider audience, which at the same time are very powerful, are presented in the book that defend the historical truth of the Bulgarian character of the population in Eastern Albania after World War II, when Vardar Macedonia was set apart as an autonomous political entity within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. With the decision of the Communist International, the population within the borders of Republic of Macedonia as well as the Bulgarian in Albania were subjected to Macedonization. We find evidence of this mad process in the works of a number of scholars from Skopje, who based their works on previous demographic studies, and most shamelessly falsified the existing documents by substituting the ethnonym „Bulgarians“ with „Macedonians“. Aiding the Yugoslavian communist denationalization of the Bulgarians in Macedonia, at the present time, there are some Russian scientists, who have not severed their ties with the concepts adopted during the time of the USSR stemming from the decision of the Communist International for imposing a Macedonian language and ethnicity.

The treatise of associate professor Dr. Spas Tashev is the first valuable ethno-demographic research dedicated to the Bulgarians in Albania, that uses scientific principles to prove the Bulgarian speaking population of Albania belongs to the Bulgarian ethnicity. An especially strong argument in the defence of his thesis is the Ottoman sultan's Royal Decree issued on February 28th, 1870, allowing the foundation of the Bulgarian Exarchate. After the plebiscite conducted in Macedonia, the Bulgarian eparchies of Skopje, Ohrid, and Bitola included Gollubordë, Mala Prespa and the village of Vernik („Vrabnik“ in Bulgarian) were included in the Exarchate. In

1918, France and Austria-Hungary in their capacity as supreme war-time victors conducted a census in the Albanian provinces they administered. The results show that the people in these regions, including Bulgarian Muslims, identified themselves as Bulgarians.

In the first part of his work on Bulgarian communities in the Western Balkans, the author carried out the objectives he set for himself competently – the clarification of the numbers of the Bulgarian minority at the time of the creation of the Albanian state; the analysis of the influence of different political, economic, and social factors over the demographic processes among Bulgarians in Albania; tracing the changes in the policy of Bulgaria and other neighbouring countries in relation to the Bulgarians in Albania and the ramifications for the Bulgarian community. The treatise has a practical and applicable contribution especially for resolving the problems relevant to the legal status of Bulgarians in Albania in the past and at the present time. Proposals for Bulgaria's national policies are developed for the purpose of preserving the sociocultural heritage of this centuries old Bulgarian community.

**Dr. Andrey Kovachev**

*Deputy Chairman of the Group of the European People's Party  
in the European Parliament*

## FOREWORD

The case of the Bulgarian diaspora beyond the political boundaries of Bulgaria has continued to stir the attention of the Bulgarian community for almost a century and a half – starting from the first couple of decades after the liberation of Bulgaria up to the present day. This topic became painfully pressing after the wars between 1912 and 1918 and the following national catastrophes that left a numerous population of Bulgarian descent beyond the border of the Bulgarian state. After an extended break during the communist era, interest towards this topic was revived fully during the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup>. As a result of this interest, a series of studies and documentary publications have been issued concerning the Bulgarian communities in the neighbouring Balkan countries, within the borders of the former Russian Empire, in the countries of Central and Western Europe, the Americas and Australia. Understandably, the interest of Bulgarian researchers is focused on the tragic fate of Macedonian and Thracian Bulgarians, while interest in other smaller Bulgarian communities remains of secondary importance. This is the case of the Bulgarians who found themselves within the borders of Albania after the formation of the Albanian state in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In spite of that, during the two latest decades, the topic has been a subject of study by Bulgarian historians and ethnographers such as Sv. Eldarov, V. Toncheva and others. However, thorough historical demographic research, that would trace the changes in the numbers of the Bulgarian population in Albania during the dynamic political events that have happened in the country and the region during this period, was still missing.

An indisputable contribution to the study of this topic is the treatise of Associate Professor Dr. Spas Tashev, dedicated to the Bulgarian community in Albania. The publication is designed as the first volume of a series of studies dealing with the ethno-demographic development of the historical Bulgarian communities in the countries of the so called Western Balkans from 1913 to the present day. The author has a long-standing research interest in the Bulgarian community in Albania that dates back to the beginning of the democratic changes in this Balkan country in the 1990s. His research on the subject has been completed in this treatise, the goal of which is not only to trace and analyse the demographic processes that have taken place

among the Bulgarian ethnic community in Albania in the course of more than a century, but also to lay down tangible proposals for adequate policies for the Bulgarian state towards this community.

For the purpose of the study, statistical data was tracked, classified, processed and analysed. The data is from Bulgarian, Albanian, Serbian, French, Austro-Hungarian and other sources, most of which were not well known or even completely unfamiliar to the Bulgarian academic community until now. Based on these statistics, the changes in the number of the Bulgarian population in Albania were traced (as well as total for the country, as well as by regions and by towns and villages) during the duration of over a century. Political factors that have had an effect on the dynamics of this process were closely researched and analysed, for example, the attitude of the Albanian authorities regarding Bulgarians in their country; the influence exerted by the neighbouring Balkan states, primarily by Yugoslavia with propaganda of Macedonism after 1944; the lack of a consistent policy by the Bulgarian state for recognition of the cultural and educational rights of Albanian Bulgarians. Special attention was paid to the problems of the Bulgarian community in Albania at the present day, the most important of which is the loss of one's mother's tongue among people who have migrated to Albanian cities in the center of the country.

I am convinced that the treatise of Spas Tashev regarding the demographic development of the Bulgarian population in Albania from 1913 to the present day will be of interest not only to members of the academic community (historians, demographers, ethnographers, etc.), but also to a wider audience of people who care about the fate of Bulgarian communities outside the borders of the country. And last but not least – this research has the potential of assisting the efforts of the Bulgarian national institutions to develop policies for aiding and preserving the centuries old Bulgarian community in Albania.

**Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ventsislav Muchinov**

## PREFACE

The following study aims to trace and analyse the ethno-demographic development of one of the historic Bulgarian communities in the Western Balkans and the socio-political factors that have had an effect on them, starting from the period of the major territorial changes in the Balkans in 1913 up to the present day. The very term „Western Balkans“ is of a political nature and it was coined in the 21st century. It encompasses the countries on the Balkan Peninsula that are not member states of the European Union. Historical Bulgarian communities of this type exist in Albania, Serbia and Kosovo.<sup>1</sup> In the first two countries mentioned, Bulgarians have an official status as a national minority, and in the latter, Bulgarian diplomats are making strenuous efforts to have them recognized as such.

This publication is dedicated to the Bulgarians in Albania – one of the oldest, and at the same time, most recently recognized Bulgarian community, which poses a number of challenges for researchers. This topic has occupied my mind since 1992, when for the first time I was in the land of the eagles, only a few days after the downfall of the president at the time Ramiz Alia. I saw the barricades and the mounds of blood-stained bandages left after the attempts of Albanian citizens to break into foreign embassies, including the Bulgarian. Fate destined me to be the first Bulgarian citizen, who after the downfall of the communist government in Tirana, made contact with the Bulgarians in Gollobordë, Mala Prespa and the village of Vrabnik.

The contact with them was carried out in a very peculiar way. During that period, Lilyana Stoimenova, an activist in the youth movement of VMRO-DPMNE in the city of Strumica, Republic of Macedonia, visited the city of Elbasan in Albania. There she met with Ibrina Kormakova who explicitly stated she was Bulgarian. I got the latter's address, then sent her a letter and this is how what turned out to be a considerable amount of cor-

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<sup>1</sup> This study does not take into account the people of Bulgarian origin in the Republic of Northern Macedonia as they are not with a minority nature, but represent the majority of its population. At the same time the last census conducted there was in 2002 and because of this there is no recent data. In the rest of the countries in the Western Balkans there are Bulgarian communities, but they have not grown throughout history and they were formed as a result of migratory processes.

respondence between us started. From Albania, initially through her, and later independently, Ismet Tola also wrote letters to us. Back then he was one of the few people from Gollobordë who was familiar with the Cyrillic alphabet.

Not long after, I received a notarized invitation, I had an Albanian visa issued to me and together with Evgeniy Ekov and Todor Nedkov we set out to visit the Bulgarians in Albania. During this visit we created the first recordings of the dialect of the members of the Bulgarian ethnic group in its westernmost regions. Those recordings were played on radio „Blagoevgrad“ after our return by Marinela Velichkova. Later on we took a Bulgarian television crew there for the first time and, in 1993, they created the documentary film „Bulgarians in Albania“ with script-writer Valery Yakov and director Konstantin Chakarov. During that same year we, with Emil Milanov and Valentin Kitanov, brought the first Bulgarian students from Albania to our country.

During my visits to Albania, I started my early research in the area. Through my established contacts with the local population and mostly through the representatives of the local authorities, I started collecting statistical data about the number of Bulgarians in Albania. Based on the information I accumulated and the materials I traced in the Bulgarian press from the years between the two world wars, I wrote my first publication „Bulgarians in Albania (1913 – 1993)“ in 1994. Along with its many flaws, its greatest contribution was the data presented in it regarding the number of the Bulgarian population in Albania at that point in time – around 37 thousand people. The published statistical information about the residents of Gollobordë, Mala Prespa, the village of Vrabnik, Korçë with its surrounding area, also included those who migrated to the larger cities in the inner parts of the country and it was comparatively accurate. The only error in it is regarding the region of Kukës Gora, which I wasn't able to visit due to the lack of good quality roads and funding. The information about it was passed on to me by the people I spoke with, who apparently also didn't have a direct impression of the area, as Albania was just beginning to come out of its long period of isolation. Because of this, the number of people whose native language was Bulgarian in the region of Kukës Gora was indicated to be 3,000. From information about this period, gathered later in time, it was determined that this number was around 13,000. Taking this fact into account, I reckon that the number of people in Albania in 1993, for



whom Bulgarian was a native language, was around 47,000.

But of course this number does not encompass all people of Bulgarian origin. During the meetings I conducted, especially in Elbasan and Tirana, I had the opportunity to meet descendants of Bulgarians, who had migrated to those two cities in the 1920s, 1930s, and the 1950s. A large portion of them were born of mixed marriages and, as a rule of thumb, they had lost their knowledge of the Bulgarian language. This led me to start researching, as much as circumstances permitted, the current internal migration of Bulgarians in Albania in order to clarify the impact that migration has on the Bulgarian identity.

Svetozar Eldarov notes that „the case of the Bulgarian population in Albania during 1913 – 1939 was rarely a subject of interest among academic historians. What presented itself as more inquisitive than academic was its unpretentious close friend – political journalism. Although it too deals with the subject sporadically, mainly for the needs of the political conjuncture“ (Eldarov, 2000).

Quite possibly the first mention of Bulgarians in Albania is in an article published in two consecutive issues of the newspaper „Pryaporets“ in June of 1914. (Pryaporets, 1914). The data published in the newspaper that same year is also covered in the works of Doctor Tabakov „Albania in the Past“ (Tabakov, 1914). Merely 15 years later in the bulletin „Father Paissiy“ the article of Georgi Traychev „Bulgarian Settlements in Modern Day Albania“ was published in which data from the old statistics of the Ex-archate (Traychev, 1929) were used. After that, G. Traychev gathered more precise data and he published another article on the matter.

During the period between 1929 and 1933, Srebren Poppetrov emerged as a very active researcher and an expert on the subject. He visited the regions in Albania inhabited by Bulgarians and gathered important statistical information about their numbers, occupation, education and religion. A part of his research was published in the bulletin „Father Paissiy“ (Poppetrov, 1929, 1931, 1932, 1933). However, in the following several years of peace, interest in the Bulgarians in Albania declined in the political journalism field. In 1937, that same bulletin „Father Paissiy“ published just one article on this subject.

After the outbreak of World War II and especially after April, 1941, public attention was turned towards Macedonia, and in the context of the relations between Bulgaria and Albania, but also between Bulgaria and Ita-

ly, attention was put on several unsolved problems for the Bulgarians in the areas of Western Macedonia who were „under Italian occupation but under Albanian administration“, as it was written in the documents from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations of that period, which caused the topic of Bulgarians within the internationally recognised borders of Albania to be moved to the background.

After September, 9th 1944, the question of the Bulgarians in Albania was completely removed from the government's agenda. It was not until 1981, during the celebrations of 1300 years since the foundation of Bulgaria, that new publications emerged presenting brief evidence for Bulgarians living in the area of the city of Korçë in the recent past. This added an additional burden on the complicated diplomatic relations between Tirana and Sofia during that period of time. A brilliant exception, but not the only one of this category, is the article by Bobi Bobev „On the Topic of the Bulgarian National Minority in Albania after the End of the First World War“, published in 1985 (Bobev, 1985). Though this lack of interest by the Bulgarian authorities was partially compensated by the Macedonian-Bulgarian emigration, in which an emphasized interest on the subject was manifested. In his memoirs, the last leader of the Macedonian Liberation Movement, Ivan Mihaylov, examined the pressure that Greece and Yugoslavia exerted on Albania not to enforce the closing protocol of the Second Balkan Conference of 1932, which they had signed. In article 1 of this statement, it was written that the government „recognizes the existence of a Bulgarian minority in Albania“ (Mihaylov, 1973).

Only after the beginning of the democratic changes in Bulgaria in 1989 did the topic start to peak the interest of the academic community again. Political articles were published in the newspaper „Macedonia“ as early as 1992, and the first academic publication was in a collection of academic papers presented at a symposium in 1994 (Tashev, 1994). In 1998, Stoyan Raychevski, in his treatise about the Bulgarian Muslims, also examines this group in Albania (Raychevski, 1998). A serious contribution for shedding light on the fate of all the Bulgarians in Albania was made by Sv. Eldarov with his book „Bulgarians in Albania 1913 – 1939. Research and Documents“ (Eldarov, 2000). Not only does the author do a deep analysis of the situation in which our compatriots found themselves and the government policies aimed at them, but he also published a number of documents containing important statistical information. All the documents from the

period between 1913 and 1939, for which no source is given in this publication, are taken from his treatise.

Veselka Toncheva, from the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore at the Ethnographic museum of BAS (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences), is a very distinguished researcher and expert on the subject. Between 2008 and 2016, she published 4 books and 39 articles, all dedicated primarily to the ethnography and folklore, but also to different aspects of the history of the Bulgarians in Albania. In some of her works, statistical information is presented about several towns and villages (Toncheva, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016).

I also have to mention both of the volumes of the collection „Bulgarians in Albania and Kosovo“, published by the association for cultural education „Ognishte“ with president Georgi Stamenov (Ognishte, 2000, 2005). Among other Bulgarian researchers of this topic, we should also mention Tanya Mangalakova with her book „Our Fellow Countrymen in Kosovo and Albania“ (Mangalakova, 2008), Yordan Kolev with his article „Bulgarians in Albania before 1939“ (Kolev, 2009), Stanislav Stanev with his analysis „Legal Status and Actual Situation of the Minorities in the Western Balkans: Republic of Macedonia and Republic of Albania“ (Stanev, 2016). From memoir literature, the book by Mihail Ognyanov „Macedonia – Experienced Fate“ (Ognyanov, 2002) deserves special attention. In it, he, as a witness, describes not only the life of Bulgarians in Albania through the 1920s 1930s, and the first half of the 1940s, but also the policy of national transformation of that same population that Enver Hoxha conducted towards this people after 1944.

The former republic of Yugoslavia also displayed a notable interest towards the case of the Bulgarians in Albania. In 1924, Jovan Haji-Vasilevic published the book „Muslims of our own Blood in Southern Serbia“ in which the Bulgarian Muslims in Gollobordë are declared Serbs, and the region they inhabit, regardless of being within Albanian borders, is presented as a part of Southern Serbia (Haji-Vasilevic, 1924). An identical approach was used in 1940 by Milenko Filipovic in his book „Gollobordë. Notes about Settlements, Lineage of the Population, Everyday Life and Traditions“. In this publication, the Bulgarians in Albania are not only declared to be Serbs, but the region where they live is also described as a „Serbian precinct“ (Filipovic, 1940). Despite their weaknesses, these two publications contain valuable statistical information about the number of

residents of different villages, the family structures and their means of livelihood.

Later, a similar political approach was borrowed for the assignment of ethnic identification in the Republic of North Macedonia. For example, in 1998 Zoran Todorovski published the article „Demographic and Ethnic Composition of the Population in the Eastern Regions of Albania during the 1930s“ (Todorovski, 1998). The research is conducted based on the statistical data gathered by Srebren Poppetrov, which the author himself defines as „detailed and precise“. At the same time, contrary to any scientific method, Z. Todorovski replaces the ethnonym „Bulgarians“ with „Macedonians“ and writes about a „Macedonian population“ in Albania, despite the fact that such a term was never used anywhere by Sr. Poppetrov. What should also be mentioned here is the treatise „Prespa“ by Iliya Chavkalovski (Chavkalovski, 2001). This author, in the spirit of the Macedonist traditions, also replaces everywhere „Bulgarians“ with „Macedonians“. Presenting the data from the book „Prespa“, published by Georgi Traychev in 1923 in Sofia, I. Chavkalovski writes that 18,673 Macedonians lived in the Prespa valley in 1900, and in 1910, the number of Macedonians was 22,719. Among all the publications teeming with falsified data, one stands out vividly – the treatise by Katerina Todoroska „Macedonians in Albania 1912 – 1991“ (Todoroska, 2014). Despite the fact that for the period of the Second World War, she used documents from the Bulgarian archives, mostly statistical information gathered by Sr. Poppetrov, the author replaces „Bulgarians“ with „Macedonians“ everywhere. For the period between 1944 and 1991, she declares as Macedonians not only the residents of Mala Prespa, who were subjected to heavy Macedonization by the communist regime, but also those in Kukës Gora, Gollobordë, Poletto and the region of Korçë, although they were affected much less by this process or even not at all in some villages.

From the foreign publications dedicated to the Bulgarians in Albania, the treatise „Gollobordë, Albania. Materials from the Expedition of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Saint Petersburg State University to the Balkans 2008-2010“ (Sobolev, Novik, 2013), published in Russia in 2013 under the supervision of A.N. Sobolev and A.A. Novik, peaks our interest. In this publication, one can also find statistical data about some of the villages in the area where the team worked. Among these villages are Trebisht, Klenjë and Vrabnik. Alas, the approach of the Russian researchers

is burdened by the views adopted during the USSR era about the existence of a so called Macedonian language and ethnicity. After the expedition concluded, A. Novik not only declared in an article of his that the majority of the population of Gollobordë is „Macedonian Muslim“, but he also denies the usage of the ethnonym „Bulgarians“ (Novik, 2009). A similar, albeit not as emphatically presented thesis was written by another member of the Russian Science Expedition in Albania – M. S. Morozova. In her article „Characteristics of Communication in Conditions of Non-balanced Bilingualism: Slavic-Albanian Interference and Code Switching,“ the author writes that „the residents of the villages speak in their local Macedonian dialect“ and never mentions the fact that the local residents call the language in which they converse on a daily basis “Bulgarian” (Morozova, 2019).

Among the Albanian researchers on the topic of the Bulgarians in Albania, the article „Bilingual Regions on the Territory of the Republic of Albania“ by Migena Balla deserves some attention. In it, she examines the situation of the officially recognized national minorities in Albania, among which is the Bulgarian, one that was recognized most recently in 2017, (Balla, 2018). In connection to the dispute between the old and the new Law of Minorities and the ethnic belonging of Bulgarians in Albania, M. Balla writes that „according to the old law the Greek, the Macedonian and the Serbian-Montenegrin minorities were recognized as ethnic minorities, while the Vlachs and the Roma as ethno-linguistic minorities, and the Bosnians and the Roma as minority communities, but Bulgarians were considered as Macedonians“.

Without pretending for the thoroughness of the bibliography of her publications dedicated to the Bulgarians in Albania, the survey conducted reveals not only the rapidly increasing scientific interest regarding this subject in the last 20 years, but also how multifaceted its interpretations are. At the same time, there is a lack of ethno-demographic research dedicated to the Bulgarians in Albania throughout the different periods from the formation of the Albanian state to the present day. With regards to this conclusion, the goal of the research to follow is the demographic processes that have taken place among the ethnic Bulgarian community in Albania. The demographic analysis covers the time period from the formation of the independent Albanian state in 1913 up to the present day. The long duration of the examined period of over 130 years allows for some deductions to be made about the growth of the Bulgarian population from the moment of its

inclusion in the structure of Albania in and after 1913 and, subsequently, to trace its changes. Regarding the accent on the analysis of the demographic statistical data, the historical narrative is limited to the necessary minimum for better perceiving the context of different events that have caused demographic changes or the factors that have affected them. This allows us to precisely clarify and trace the historical conditioning of the modern ethno-demographic processes among the Bulgarians in Albania and to propose solutions to resolve looming issues efficiently.

The subject of this research is to reveal and analyse the specifics of various political, economic and sociocultural factors, their connection to and impact over the fundamental demographic processes and ultimately to clarify and trace how all this reflects the variation of the numbers of the representatives of the Bulgarian ethnic community in Albania.

By taking into account the universality established by M. Balla about the origin of the people, who in present day Albania identify themselves as Bulgarians or Macedonians and by proceeding from the findings that during the period before 1944 they are viewed as Bulgarians in a number of documents, the same ethnonym is used for all the representatives of the group during the period in question. Firstly, we take into account the fact that article 10 of the *Firman* (royal decree) of the sultan from February, 28th 1870 for the formation of the Bulgarian Exarchate allows other eparchies to be recognized as Bulgarian if at least 2/3 of the Christian followers in it wishes it so. According to this paragraph, a plebiscite (*istilyam*) was conducted in Macedonia under the control of the Ottoman authorities and the Ecumenical Patriarchate. This is how after the successfully conducted referendum, the Skopje, Ohrid and Bitola eparchies came to be and the regions of Gollobordë, Mala Prespa and Vrabnik were included in them. In this case, what is important is the conclusion that there is no denying the fact that Bulgarian Christians, who lived in these territories that became part of Albania after 1913, were free to determine their own ethnicity.

In 1918, France and Austria-Hungary in their capacity as victors, each took an official census of the population in the Albanian provinces they administered. The French census encompassed the territories around the autonomous province of Korçë and the residents of the villages Dre-novo, Boboshticë, and the region of Mala Prespa were described as Bulgarians. The census by Austria-Hungary was taken in Central and Northern Albania (with the exclusion of Gollobordë) and also marks the presence of



Bulgarians in the regions Poletto and Gora. The French census is especially significant having in mind the accomplished succession on the official transfer of power to the Albanian government in 1920. Besides all that, during this period, the population in question in those regions, including the Bulgarian Muslims, was viewed as Bulgarian, not only in the documents issued by the Bulgarian national institutions, but also in articles published in the Albanian press.

Having in mind the events that occurred after 1944, namely the policies of Macedonization that was conducted with various intensity over parts of the population of Mala Prespa and the village of Vrabnik and the Albanization of the residents of other areas, followed by the official recognition in 2017 of a Bulgarian minority, and without this being statistically documented in the results of a local census, meaning the residents' will has not been officially documented, the current representatives of this group are considered to be people of Bulgarian descent. In this case, the conclusion stems from section 2 article 1 from the additional provisions of the Law for the Bulgarian Citizenship, according to which „in the context of this law, a „person of Bulgarian origin“ is a person of whom at least one of their relatives is Bulgarian“. In this research, the focus is primarily on those whose mother tongue nowadays continues to be Bulgarian.

When drawing conclusions from the available data, one can formulate the following fundamental tasks that this paper covers:

1. Clarifying the number of people in the Bulgarian minority at the moment when the Albanian state was founded.
2. Clarifying the influence of various political, economic, and sociocultural factors over the demographic processes among Bulgarians in Albania through the various periods of the country's existence and how they have affected the changes in the numbers that occurred.
3. Clarifying and tracking the changes in the policy of Bulgaria and other neighbouring countries regarding the Bulgarians in Albania throughout the various periods and the consequences to the Bulgarian community.
4. Clarifying the current demographic processes among the people of Bulgarian descent in Albania and forming proposals for more adequate policies.

Consequently, the structure of this paper follows these tasks as they have been laid down. For the purpose of achieving these objectives, various documents and demographic and statistical data, stored in Bulgarian, Albanian and other foreign archives, including data from censuses, were traced and analysed. Other sources of information used here include diplomatic, church, school, and military documents, as well as eyewitness testimonials of the numbers and size of villages with a Bulgarian population, but also methods of the organization and management of agriculture, data from tombstones, documents from Bulgarian organizations in Albania, etc. For the purpose of the analysis of the processes in Albania during the 1970s and the 1980s, archived documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were used. Due to the fact that some of the authors of these documents are still alive and some even are still practicing their professions, their names have not been noted.

In the development of the topic, a critical examination of the policies, legislation and existing practices towards the Bulgarians in Albania was conducted. For the first time period of this research, the available information allows for the usage of basic history demographical methods and, mainly, the restoration of family history (Shterionov, 2019). In this way, the historical demographics of the Bulgarians in Albania are clarified to some extent. The more recent documents and other sources of information are used for clarifying the current political and ethno-demographic processes among the people of Bulgarian descent in Albania. Within the framework of this kind of research, several interviews with a biographical narrative were conducted. In their essence, they are a qualitative approach for examining complex phenomena of the human condition with its social, cultural, psychological, and political dimensions in the context of the problem of the Bulgarians in Albania. By using the biographical narrative method, the information missing from the available documents regarding certain matters was gathered, mostly when researching the modern migration of the Bulgarians in Albania and its effects on the migrant communities.

In the presentation of current events and statements by government officials related to the problems of people of Bulgarian descent in Albania, bulletins of various news agencies such as BNA (Bulgarian News Agency), „Focus“, BGNES, „Mediapool“, and others were used. The official websites of institutions that organized or participated in these manifestations

were also used.

In its essence, this paper constitutes research whose methodology is founded on the interdisciplinary approach. Various political and ethno-demographical aspects in the past and the present of the Bulgarians in Albania are revealed, not only through analysis of the available documents and the statistical data, but also through tracing historical, political, and social processes with their characteristic specifics for each period. Such an approach proves to be especially suitable for discovering political and ethno-demographical patterns in the development of the Bulgarians in Albania, even more so since the demographic transition there takes on a different dimension compared to Bulgaria.

The following chronological systematization have been done for the first time: The processing and analysis of statistical data from numerous sources, some of which are not well-known and which the Bulgarian scientific community has no knowledge of, for example, the census conducted in 1918 by France and Austria-Hungary, while others were completely obscure to the public until recently, for example, the data about the language spoken by the population of Albania according to an official inquiry from 1935 by the Ministry of the Interior's Secret Service. Also, statistical data, although incomplete, about the people of Bulgarian descent for the period between 1944 and 1991 was tracked down. During this period Albania was an isolated country and was inaccessible to most of the foreign explorers. Other examined subjects include the policy of the ethnic transformation of the Bulgarians in Albania that started in 1944, the consequences it had, the attempts for self-preservation of the Bulgarian community and its culture after the expulsion of the Yugoslavian teachers in 1948 and the establishing of a regional literature, based on the local Bulgarian dialect of Prespa using the Bulgarian alphabet. The current migration processes are traced and the number of residents of the towns and villages inhabited primarily by people of Bulgarian descent according to the censuses conducted in 2001 and 2011 are indicated. The analysis of the legal status of Bulgarians in Albania in the past and at the present time and the clarification of its practical importance for determining the Bulgarian origins of many people stands out as a practical applicable contribution.

The conclusions about the progress of ethno-demographical processes among the Bulgarians in Albania and the expected consequences are academically substantiated. Using them as basic proposals for policies

aiming at the preservation of the sociocultural heritage of this community have been developed.

This book is designed for demographers, ethnographers, historians, diplomats, and for a wider audience of people who would be interested in the past or present of the Bulgarians in Albania. The research would also pose an interest to the people in question – the Bulgarians in Albania, and could also contribute to the mutual familiarization between Bulgarians and Albanians.

## *Chapter I*

# **THE BULGARIANS IN THE ALBANIAN LANDS BEFORE THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE AND THE FIRST YEARS OF THE EXISTENCE OF ALBANIAN STATE**

### **1.1. Information about Bulgarians in the Albanian lands during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance**

In the early Middle Ages the Bulgarians called the territory of modern day Southern Albania Kutmichevitsa. The region was also known as the Devol Comitatus. Later, the name Kutmichevitsa gradually disappeared and was replaced by the Arbanasi Lands, which comprised modern day Northern Albania as well. In Albanian historiography, the name Illyria was established around this period. At the end of the 14th century, the Albanian geonym Shqipëria, i.e. Albania, was established. The etymological origin of the geonym *Albania* comes from the name of the city of Albanon, also known as Albanum. Also, the term Arnavutluk was widely used during Ottoman rule.

The settling of Bulgars and Slavs in the Albanian lands started around the end of the 4th century. It was eased by the fact that these territories were ravaged and pretty much deserted due the Barbarian incursions. The fear of the atrocities these barbarians perpetrated was great. It caused the local population to leave their cities and fortresses more and more with every incursion and to seek salvation in the mountains or on the Adriatic islands. In 450, Illyria was overrun by the invasions by Huns and Bulgars and they captured and destroyed 32 fortresses (Frasheri, 1964). Kuber's Bulgaria, founded around 680, included all territories of modern day Albania. Besides the written sources, like the collection of homilies entitled „Miracles of Saint Demetrius“, „The Chronicles of Theophanes the Confessor“, The Breviary of Nikephoros I of Constantinople“, „The Synaxarium of Constantinople“, etc., this fact is confirmed by archaeological data as well. Among this data, the rich Bulgar treasures, found near the modern day Albanian villages Vrap, south of Tirana, and near Erseka, in the area of Korçë stand out (Popov, 2018).

The Barbarian incursions paved the way for Slavic settlers. In 548, they appeared before the walls of Durrës. Especially intense was the Slavic colonisation in the 7th century in the valley areas which were suitable for agriculture (Frasheri, 1964). Strabon the Epithomist, the Byzantine author from the 11th century, wrote that in his time „the whole of Epirus, Greece, Peloponnese, and Macedonia are inhabited by Slavs“ (Γρηγορόβιος, 2013). Besides the historical sources about the settling of Slavs on the territory of modern day Albania, scientists make conclusions from toponymic data (Makushev, 1871; Selishchev, 1931; Arsh and collective, 1992). For example, preserved documents with the names of 1,539 settlements in modern day Southern Albania show that 717 of them, or about half, have a Slavic origin. The presence of Slavic toponyms is an indication of the Slavic presence, but judging by this number, no conclusion can be made about the exact proportion of the various ethnic groups within the population. Even more so, in the years that followed, many changes occurred in its composition.

Albanian academics like K. Frasheri accept that the names of Slavic origin of settlements, valleys, hills, mountains, and rivers in Albania are remnants of the period of the Slavic colonisation. This conclusion, however, means that Slavs didn't settle only in the valleys, but also moved to the mountainous regions of the Albanian lands. Using archaeological research as his basis, K. Frasheri comes to the conclusion that „the dominant mass in the population that lived on the territory of Albania in the 8th century, was of free villagers and mountaineers organized in agricultural and herds-men's communities. In the ethnic aspect, this population was mixed: within the Illyrian population, which was the majority, there were powerful Slavic colonies, while along the coasts there were Roman colonies, also referred to as Romanised Illyrians“. The Russian Slavist A. Selishchev reckons that „the Slavic population of Albania was numerous“ (Selishchev, 1931).

What must be emphasized here is that such a conclusion is not shared by some Albanian scholars such as A. Buda and others, according to whom the number of Slavs in the Albanian lands is over-exaggerated. But even they do not deny the existence of such a process in the past. Other Albanian researchers like Skënder Muçaj, Suela Xhyheri, and Irklid Ristani think that the territory of Southern Albania „was in a Slavic-Greek contact zone, evidence for which is the many Greek loan words, including many common words found in the early Slavic liturgical texts“ (Muçaj, Xhyheri, and Ristani, 2014).



Despite the extremely polarized views, two fundamental theories about the origins of the Albanians have formed. According to the Illyrian theory, modern day Albanians are direct descendants of the ancient Illyrians, who despite the foreign incursions, managed to win the battles and preserve the lands of their ancestors. According to the Dardanian theory, the basis of the appearance of modern day Albanians is a complex ethno-formational process that includes the mixing of local and colonist populations. The presence of a significant number of words of Slavic origin in the Albanian language is also quite a strong argument, not only in favour of the presence of a numerous Slavic population in the Albanian lands in the past, but also of the continuous co-existence of Slavs and Albanians and the cultural interactions between them.

The proportion between the different ethnic groups that inhabited the territories of modern day Albania throughout the Middle Ages is a topic that has been of interest to researchers for a long time. Vikentiy Makushev writes: „If detailed descriptions of Albania through the Middle Ages had been preserved, it would have been easy to determine with mathematical precision what the proportion between the Slavic and the Albanian population was at the time“ (Makushev, 1871). He published the data of the only detailed description from 1416 that has survived to present day. A description written by Petrus de Sancto Odorico that was commissioned by the Venetian government and related to the region of Scutari (the city of Shkodra) in present day in Northern Albania. The document contains the names of all the villages and lands in the surroundings of Shkodra, the number of houses in each of them, the names of all the householders and the taxes that were due. According to this information, in the region there were 114 settlements with a total of 1,237 houses: 38 villages with 447 houses north of Shkodra and 76 villages with 790 houses south of the city. The analysis of the names of the householders shows the conclusion that 387 houses were owned by people of Slavic descent: 246 in the villages north of Shkodra and 141 in the southern areas of the region. Based on this data, Makushev concludes that the ratio between Slavs and Albanians during this period was 1:2 or, more precisely, Slavs constituted 31.29% of the entire population. For the other regions of modern day Albania there are no such lists preserved with the names of the residents, so that one may formulate conclusions about their origin.

The changes in the social organization of the Slavs who settled in Albanian lands and the resilience of their community are undoubtedly con-

nected to the dynamics of the political and territorial changes on the Balkan peninsula. The importance of the government authority as a carrier and a conduit for a certain type of culture is especially great. In the medieval history of the Albanian lands, there are four distinct periods during which the land was ruled by Slavic countries: two Serbian periods, in 7th and in 14th centuries, and two Bulgarian periods, in 9th to 10th and 12th to 13th centuries.

In 851, the Bulgarian Khan Presian I (836-852) captured Ohrid, Devol, and Glavinitsa. Under the rule of Boris I (852-889) Bulgaria annexed Beligrad (modern day Berat) and the lands north of Vlora (Frasheri, 1964).

The historical sources point out that during this period, that the the three fundamental groups, the combination of which formed the Bulgarian nationality in the Balkans: Bulgars, Slavs and the local population, lived in the territories of modern day Albania<sup>2</sup>. The expansion of the Bulgarian state towards the Adriatic Sea coincided with the official adoption of Christianity, which gave a massive push to the process of blending of those ethnic groups. For the needs of Christianity, in the capital city Pliska and in Ohrid, literary centres were founded in which an immense amount of translation from Greek to into Slavonic language was done<sup>3</sup>, at first in the Glagolitic alphabet created by Cyril and Methodius.

Under the rule of Tsar Simeon I (893-927), the Bulgarian territories expanded along the coast of the Adriatic Sea and only a narrow strip around Durrës, from within the modern day boundaries of Albania remained outside of Bulgarian rule at the time. At the end of 893 or the beginning of 894, the Preslav Assembly took place in the capital. One of the decisions taken was to replace the Greek language with Slavonic during the liturgies. In the Preslav Literary School at the end of the 9th or the beginning of the 10th century, a new alphabet was created– the Cyrillic script. It was a writing system that was more simplified and better suited for general use. It

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<sup>2</sup> According to a number of researchers such as Friedrich Müller, Gancho Tsenov, and Yordan Ivanov, the ancient inhabitants of the modern day Bulgarian and Albanian territories belonged to the Thracian-Illyrian family, which was divided into two tribal groups: Eastern (Thracian) and Western (Illyrian). They were so close to each other, that a number of ancient authors like Cassius Dio, Stephanus of Byzantium and others find it hard to differentiate between them.

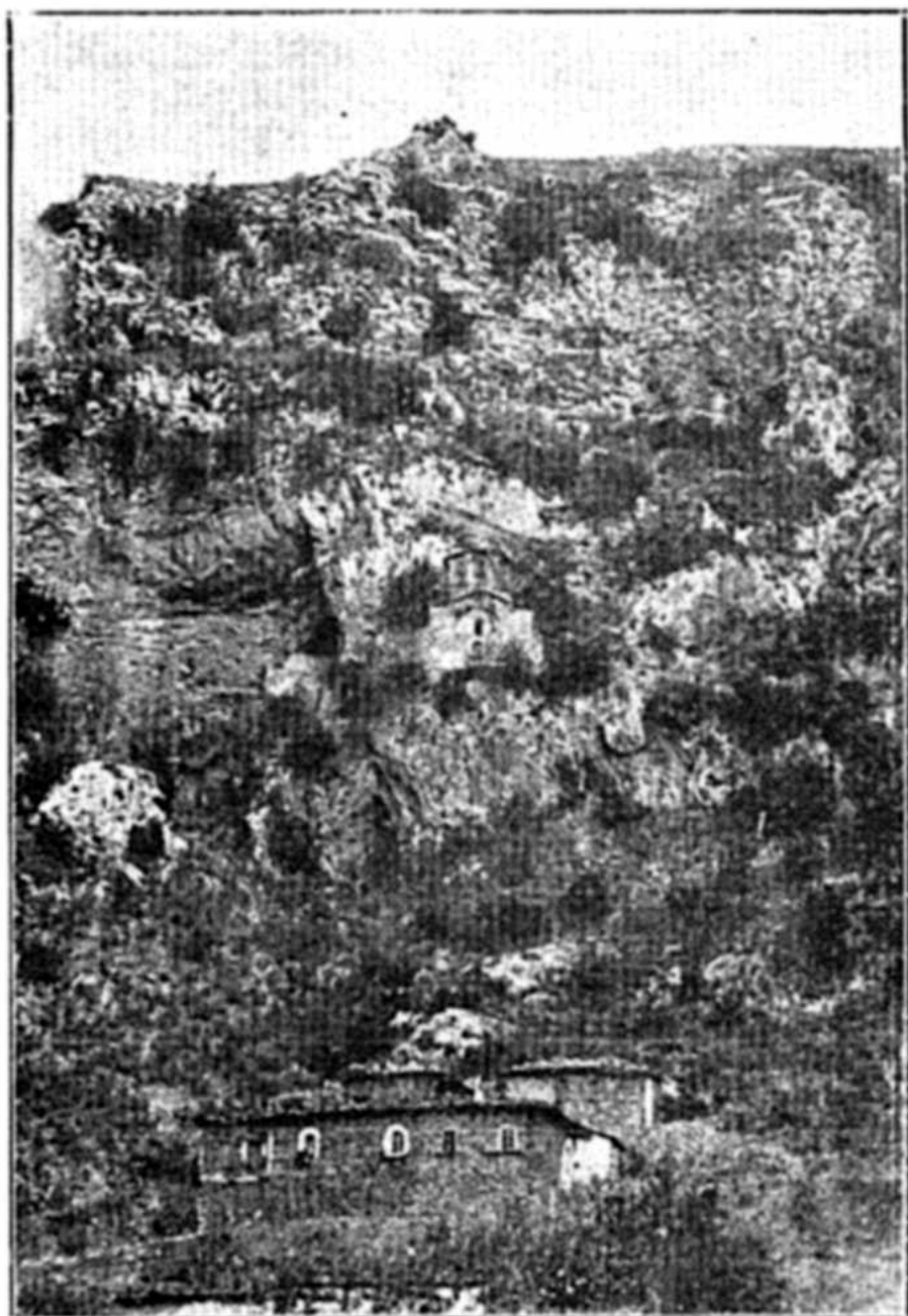
<sup>3</sup> The original name of the language is „Slovic“, many researchers conclude that its etymological origin is the word „slovo“, meaning „speech“. The term „Slavic“ is a late ethnonym that was coined in the 17th century.

was introduced into the Ohrid Literary School and gradually replaced the Glagolitic alphabet. The numerous scribes in the scriptoria wrote, translated and edited books, in which they solidified the characteristics of spoken Bulgarian dialects of that period on the territory of the entire country. Thus the supradialectal Old Bulgarian Literary Language was formed, which became official for the Bulgarian State. It was used by the administration, and in it literary works were written, and terminologically speaking, „Old Bulgarian“ is identical to „Old Church Slavonic“, a term used by some linguists and other academics (Kocheva-Lefedzhieva, 2012).

This process also influenced the politically related name „Bulgarians“ that was used for the subjects of the Bulgarian Tsar, to gradually become a demonym of nationality, which has been used ever since, even during periods when there was no Bulgarian state. This becomes especially clear after the demise of Tsar Simeon I, when the downfall of the First Bulgarian Empire began. Byzantium succeeded in capturing Southeastern Bulgaria, but Tsar Samuil (who reigned monocratically from 997 to 1014) not only held the Western Bulgarian lands, but also expanded them by capturing Durrës in 989. The last battle between Samuil and the Byzantine emperor Basil II was on the territory of modern day Albania in the vicinity of Beligrad. The last organized resistance of the Bulgarians against Basil II also took place in southern Albania. Leading this resistance was Presian – the first born son of Tsar Ivan Vladislav – who was killed at the walls of Durrës (Pavlov, 2000). Conquered by Byzantium in 1018, Bulgaria lost its independence for the next 167 years, and the Albanian lands fell under the Byzantine rule.

The Byzantine author George Kedrenos, who lived around the end of the 11th and the beginning of the 12th century, describes the era after the First Bulgarian Empire fell to Byzantium in the following way: „After Emperor Basil conquered Bulgaria, he did not change anything in it, but left it all as it was before and did not impose new taxes, but those laid down by Samuil. The taxation system was as follows: every Bulgarian, who owns a pair of oxen, pays one common pasture of wheat, one common pasture of millet and a ewer of wine. (Later John, Ed.) Orphanotrophos changed this tax, paid in kind, into a monetary one, which proved to be difficult for the Nicopoleans and they, by taking advantage of the unrest caused by (Petar II, Ed.) Delyan, overthrew the Byzantine servitude and went to their relatives“ (Makushev, 1871).

The historical sources point that the uprising of Petar II Delyan against Byzantine rule rose broke out in 1040. Petar II was proclaimed as a



**Ancient Bulgarian church from the time of Tsar Samuil  
near the Albanian town of Berat**



*Petar II Delyan (ὁ Δελεάνος), Tihomir (ὁ Τειχομηρός)  
and the Bulgarians (Βούλγαροι) miniature of the Madrid copy  
of the Chronicle of John Skylitzes*

descendant of Tsar Samuil. In a few months, the insurgents took control of Western Bulgaria, the Morava Valley, Macedonia, Thessaly, Epirus and almost the entire territory of modern day Albania. According to K. Frasheri, in the region of Durrës, the insurgents numbered around 40 000 men and managed to liberate the city. In 1041, Byzantium crushed the uprising and managed to restore its dominion over the rebelling lands. In their military campaigns, the Byzantines were aided by the Normans as mercenary allies, commanded by the future king of Norway Harald Hardrada. In a saga written in 1065, he is described as the „Bulgar-burner“ (Corpus Poeticum Boreale, 2010).

In 1072, another attempt at restoring the Bulgarian state was made. Another uprising against Byzantium was prepared by the Bulgarian nobles of Skopje led by the boyar Georgi Voyteh. The organizers chose Constantine Bodin as their leader, who was also a descendant of Tsar Samuil. In the fall of 1072, Constantine Bodin arrived in the city of Prizren, where he was proclaimed the Tsar of the Bulgarians under the name of Petar III. The insurgents managed to capture Ohrid and Devol in Southern Albania. At the end of the same year, the revolt was crushed.

In 1185, after the successful uprising against Byzantium led by Asen and Petar, the Bulgarian state was restored. In the reign of Tsar Kaloyan (1197-1207), Bulgaria annexed the Devol province of modern day Albania.



The territorial expansion continued to the west under Tsar Ivan Asen II (1218-1241) too, who in 1230 awarded the Dubrovnik merchants a Charter certifying their right to trade freely with his country. In this document, it is explicitly mentioned that the country encompasses the Devol province and the *Arbanasi* or Albanian lands. In 1237, Tsar Ivan Asen II made a kinship union with Theodore I and recognized him as the despot of Epirus. With this act, Bulgarian rule over the Albanian lands ended.

The Bulgarian state presence solidified, the Bulgarian national consciousness among those Bulgaro-Slavs who lived in the Albanian lands and left a lasting memory among the Albanian population. For example, the well-known lay church chanter and composer John Koukouzelis, born around 1280 in Durrës, dedicated one of his most famous compositions „Polyeleos of the Bulgarian Woman“ to his mother. Despite the fact that his works were mainly written in Greek, in this one he quotes his mother’s words in Bulgarian transcribed in the Greek alphabet „My dear child, John, where art thou?“.<sup>4</sup> Also significant is the fact that the mother of the Albanian national hero Gjergj Kastrioti – Skanderber (1405 – 1468) who was called Voisava, was the daughter of a Bulgarian boyar from Polog (Tetovo-Gostivar valley in modern day North Macedonia) (Makushev, 1871). These examples irrefutably show the presence of Bulgarian ethnic group in the modern day Albanian lands throughout this period, even when they were no longer a part of the Bulgarian state after 1237.

Considering the evidence that has survived up to our time, one can conclude that the Bulgarian rulers of the Albanian lands left behind memories of justice, philanthropy, and piety. This is the reason why these territories were governed by Bulgarian laws, even in the early stages of Byzantine rule. From an ethnographic point of view, one concludes that the cultural policies the Bulgarian state in this period, especially under the rule of Tsar Simeon I, a period known as the Golden Age of Bulgarian literature, encompassed both Bulgars and Slavs in modern day Albanian territories. This fact left its lasting mark as it was instrumental in the the preservation of the Old Bulgarian language among them, as well as other socio-cultural characteristics, common to the group of the Bulgarian Slavs.

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<sup>4</sup> In his youth John Koukouzelis did not speak Greek well. When he was studying in Constantinople he was asked what he was eating, and he replied with a mixture of Bulgarian and Greek words „kukiya ke zeliya“ (κουκιά και ζέλια) trying to explain „broad beans with cabbage“. This event got him his name Koukouzelis.

Am especially important role in the preservation of the Bulgarian ethnic character of the population in Southern and Central Albania was played by the fact that these lands became a part of the Archbishopric of Ohrid, Justiniana Prima and all Bulgaria from its foundation by Basil II, after he conquered the First Bulgarian Empire up until 1767. At first, the official title of its leader was Archbishop of all Bulgaria, and from the middle of the 12th century, the title used was expanded to Archbishop of Justiniana Prima and all Bulgaria or of All Bulgarians. Especially in its early period, the liturgies were officiated in Old Bulgarian, and the church books were copied in that same language.

Taking these facts into account, A. Selishchev reckons that in Southern and Central Albania, the Slavic population is of the Bulgarian ethnicity. A Russian collective of scientists, led by G. Arsh, comes to a similar concrete conclusion. They think that „In the Albanian lands lived predominant (Slavic, Ed.) tribes from the Southeastern group who, in time, formed the Bulgarian ethos“. Only the Slavs who lived in the north of modern day Albania could be attributed to the Serbian group.

The conclusions about the Bulgarian presence in modern day Albanian lands are confirmed by a number of scientific discoveries made after the liberation of Albania in 1913. For example, in 1919 the Albanian Constantin Chekrezi, secretary of the created in 1913 International Control Commission for Albania, whose primary task was the formation of an administrative structure for the newly created state, wrote that „the presence of a number of settlements with Bulgarian names, even in areas where there



*Seal of the museum of the Archbishopric of Ohrid of Justiniana Prima, Ohrid and all Bulgaria from 1516. In the inner circle in clockwise direction we can read the words πάσης Βουλγαρίας – all Bulgaria*

**Source:** Miljković, D. *Pečat muzeja Ohridske arhiepiskopije iz 1516. godine* (1989)



is no Bulgarian population, is evidence of the fact that the invaders built large settlements in the lands they conquered“ (Chekrezi, 1919). A similar conclusion was made in 1922 by Jacques Bourcart, a contributor for civil affairs to the commander of the Albanian territories administered by France in the First World War. After processing the data gathered by the French administration, he wrote „We noticed this peculiar fact – the entire toponymy of Southern Albania, Epirus, and the remaining large part of Thessalia is of Slavic, and of Bulgarian Slavic, not of Serbian origin“ (Bourcart, 1922).

The migration movements of the population of Bulgarian descent that lived in the Albanian land are of incredibly huge interest. When analysing the information from the description of Petrus de Sancto Odorico about the region of Shkodra in 1416, V. Makushev states that there are settlements with Slavic names, but their residents were already Albanian at that point. According to him, this means that the Albanians had already started to push the Slavs to the east so that „those who remained easily lost their nationality“.

Afanasij Selishchev reckons that at the end of the 13th century, the Albanian mountaineers started relocating to the flat areas in Albania (Selishchev, 1931). The people who lived in the valleys, where the majority of the was Bulgarian, were broke and powerless. Their lineage was not as strong as in the Albanian communities and this brought disunity among the Bulgarians and it was easier to push them back. Instead of the weakening Bulgarian settlements, Albanian military communities appeared, who kept in close contact with their tribesmen who remained in the mountains and in cases of necessity, they had their support. This process was especially vibrant in the 15th and 16th centuries. This led to the formation of migration flows moving to the east. The decrease in the numbers of the remaining Bulgarians in the Albanian lands was a precondition for their gradual Albanization. According to A. Selishchev, when there was a mixed marriage between a Bulgarian man and an Albanian woman, the wives did not learn to speak Bulgarian. Thus, the next generations kept Albanian as their mother tongue and what was left of the Bulgarian communities gradually blended with the Albanian nature of the social environment. This process accelerated at the time of Ottoman rule, when some of the co-existing Bulgarians and Albanians converted to Islam. The new religion helped additionally to overcome the existing socio-cultural differences.

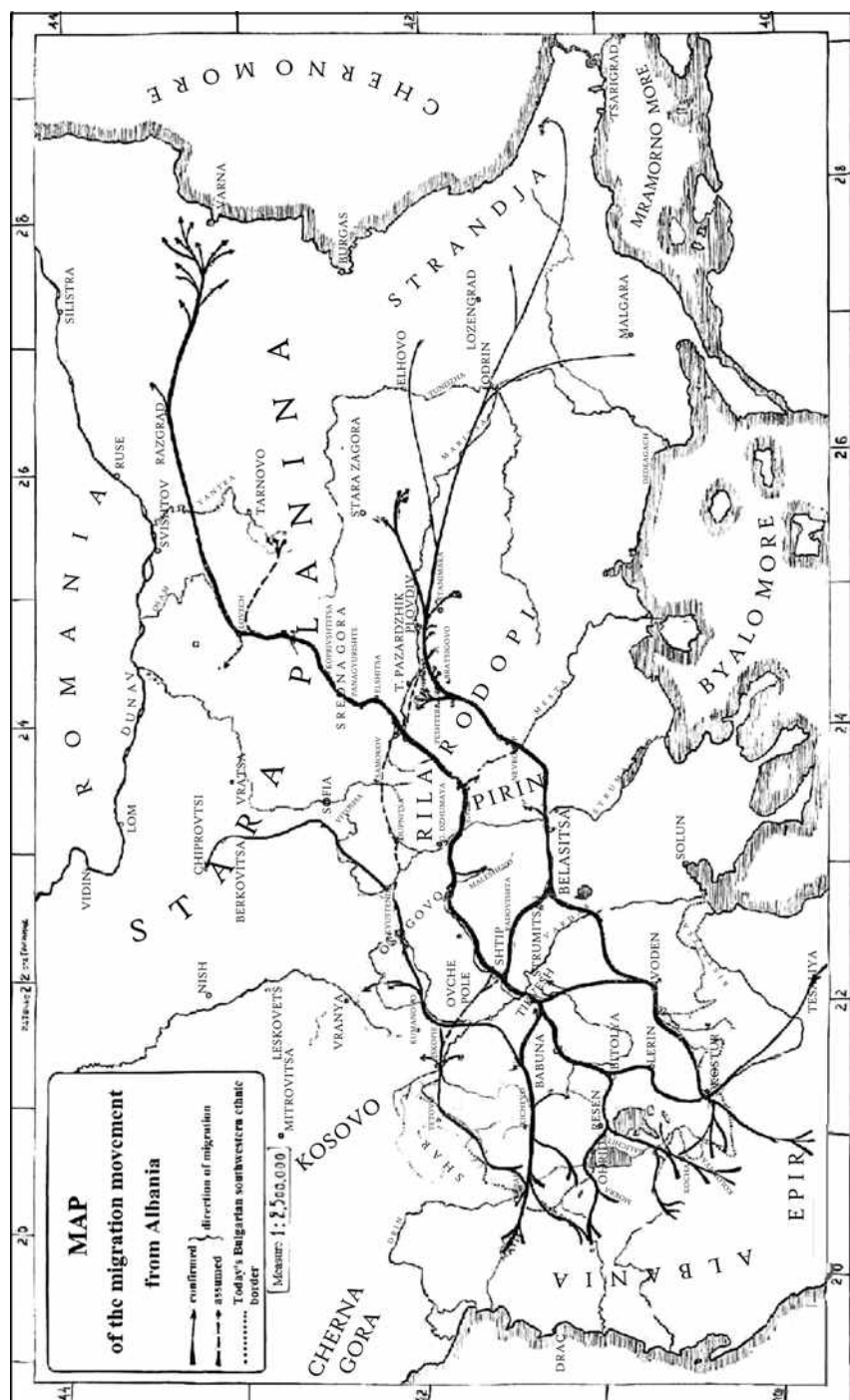
The process of de-Bulgarisation of the Albanian lands was slow. It started at the end of the 13th century in the western regions of Albania, and

in the following centuries, the territories with today's Bulgarian population moved more and more to the east. In 1885, the French journalist Auguste Meylan described the situation in the Albanian lands in this way: „The Albanian mountaineers constitute a peculiar state federation; sometimes the discord between the tribes becomes widespread and then one village fights with another and one tribe fights with another, especially between the Slavic settlements of Orthodox faith and the Albanian settlements with Catholic faith“ (Meylan, 1885).

According to a number of other document sources, in the 16th century the primary Albanian-Bulgarian ethnographic border ran along the line that connects lake Prespa and lake Ohrid, as per the description of the Venetian ambassador Lorenzo Bernardo, who in relation to his travels in 1591 wrote: „Struga, a city in Bulgaria on the border with Albania... and it is the first settlement in Bulgaria after you leave Albania. A small river runs through the city and flows into lake Ohrid... After you cross the bridge that separates Albania and Bulgaria, you enter the Struga Plain“ (Stefani, 1886). Gabriele Cavazza, a Venetian secretary who recorded the travels of Lorenzo Bernardo, notes in his report to the Senate of Venice that after he reached lake Prespa, there was Bitola which is „a settlement in Bulgaria, very well populated, and according to our information, there are 1,500 houses, 200 of which belong to Jews“ (Iorga, 1928).

When analysing how Bulgarians moved from Albania and Western Macedonia to Eastern Bulgaria, Dimitar Yaranov came to the conclusion that „This is due to the existence of a constant and heavy migration movement in the Bulgarian lands from west to east“, which „has been taking place for the last three to three and a half centuries“ (Yaranov, 1932). According to D. Yaranov, despite the fact that the movement of Bulgarians out of Albania was due to a complex number of factors, the main reason was economic in the form of the increasing attractiveness of the agricultural lands starting from the west and going to the east.

In his research „Migrant Movements, Population Capacity and Coefficient of Density“, he comes to the conclusion that the direction and the size of those movements caused by economic reasons were conditioned by the relation between the population capacity and the population density in the lands, from which they started (the dispatching regions) and in the lands to which they went (the receiving regions). By taking into account the fact that the primary source for creating material goods during this period was



Map of the migration movement of the Bulgarians from Albania in the XV – XIX century

Source: Яранов, Д. [Yaranov, D.] Преселническо движение на българи от Македония и Албания към източните български земи през XV до XIX век.

[Migration movements of Bulgarians from Macedonia and Albania to eastern parts of Bulgaria from 15th to 19th century.] (1932)

agriculture, D. Yaranov notes that the existence of a migration movement is possible only if there exists a difference in the attractiveness of the dispatching and the receiving regions. These demographic principles manifest themselves in two facts. On one hand, between the 15th and the 18th centuries, Albania and Western Macedonia were densely populated and their factor of attractiveness was low. At the same time Eastern Bulgaria (Thrace and Eastern Moesia) was more sparsely populated and its fertile lands had a much higher factor of attractiveness.

In these objectively existing conditions, the presence of political turmoil only additionally accelerated the process of de-Bulgarisation. According to Ventsislav Muchinov, „Since the first decades of the 19th century, the Ottoman authorities forcefully exiled the people living in the South-western territories (Albanian lands, Epirus, Thessalia) of the empire in the Balkans into Bulgarian lands. At the beginning of the period researched, this type of migration movement was provoked by the armed conflict of the famous Albanian separatist Ali Pasha of Ioannina and the forces loyal to the Sublime Porte... In order to crush the centers of rebel activities in Southern Macedonia, Epirus, and Thessalia, the Ottoman authorities launched forceful migration campaigns of the locals into the inner Bulgarian lands“ (Muchinov, 2013).

Precisely at the beginning of the 19th century, the Bulgarians conclusively disappeared from Epirus. Their existence is registered in a number of sources from previous periods. For example, when describing the life of Ali Pasha of Ioannina, his contemporary Alphonse de Beauchamp wrote „Albanians do not represent the entire population of Epirus nowadays; There are many other tribes like Serbians, Bulgarians, Vlachs, Turks, and Greeks“ (Beauchamp, 1822). Half a century later the newspaper „Dunavska Zora,“ published information that „Bulgarians... inhabit their own Bulgaria, Thrace, Macedonia and parts of Albania... The Bulgarians in Macedonia and Albania... amount to 2.3 million“. (Dunavska Zora, 1868). As a result of the process which we have examined, during which the Bulgarian population was pushed back from west to east in the middle and the second half of the 19th century, Bulgarians still lived in the Eastern parts of modern day Albania. Contessa Dora d'Istria, in her research on the role of women on the Balkan peninsula, at the time of her travels, stated that „Bulgarians... can be found... in Eastern Albania, where they occupy entire provinces“ (d'Istria, 1859). According to Selishchev, the Bulgarians on the Adriatic

coast and in the interior of the country during this period and after it, were not forcibly relocated, but were emigrants mostly from Western Macedonia (Selishchev, 1932).

## **1.2. The Bulgarians in the Albanian Lands at the Beginning and Development of the Organized Albanian National Liberation Movement**

On June 10th, 1878, in Prizren, the League for the Protection of the Rights of the Albanian Nation was founded, better known as the League of Prizren. Its foundation marked the beginning of the organized Albanian liberation movement. At first, the League united only Muslims, but very shortly after it was founded, many Albanian Christians (Catholic and Orthodox) also joined, after which it formed a clear Albanian national character. Including Albanians from the three major religious groups was of great significance to the Albanian liberation movement.<sup>5</sup> The League of Prizren sent their representatives to the Congress of Berlin, who defended Albanian interests – the unification of the Shkodra, Ioannina, Bitola, and Kosovo vilayets in an Albanian district with wide-spread autonomy within the borders of the Ottoman empire and not allowing annexation of territories with an Albanian population by other Balkan states. The League existed until 1881, when the Ottoman Army eliminated the Albanian armed resistance.

What creates an impression is the attempt for a combined ethnic and administrative approach by the Albanian Liberation Movement. The claims for autonomy were not limited to the territories where the Albanian population had a clear majority, but also to the existing administrative borders of the four vilayets. Within them, besides Albanians, lived also other ethnic groups, including Bulgarians, who at the time were majority in the central and eastern parts of the Bitola Vilayet. This position of the Albanian Liberation Movement gradually started being covered in some foreign publications. In 1885, O. Meylan wrote „Albania is a huge Turkish province, comprised on one side by Epirus and Macedonia, where the population calls itself Shqipetars (Albanians, Ed.)“ (Meylan, 1885).

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<sup>5</sup> This model of ethno-religious consolidation kept happening after the foundation of the Albanian state which affected the process of forming a national consciousness of the Bulgarian Muslims in Albania.

Yordan Ivanov paid much attention to this administrative-territorial problem in his report from 1916 in which he wrote „the deliberate Turkish administrative separation, the goal of which, for years now, has been the diminishment of the importance and strength of the Bulgarian spirit, going so far as to assign entire Bulgarian villages to unfitting administrative centers, and, vice versa, to assign remote Albanian Muslim and Turkish villages to this and that city, the district around which is settled primarily by Bulgarians“ (Sefterski, 2005). It is obvious that this moment is of essential importance for the relations between Bulgaria and Albania during the following period, as it is charged with potential conflicts based on partially incompatible national programs (Georgiev, 2019). By examining these contradictions, which in the following period, at certain moments, affected the relations between Bulgaria and Albania, in this part of our research, by the term „Albanian lands,“ we mean only those territories, which in and after 1913, were included within the internationally recognised borders of Albania and it is within them that the demographic development of the Bulgarian population is traced.

There are various Bulgarian and foreign statistics that contain data about a Bulgarian population in areas which after 1913 became a part of Albania. Most of them, however, present the information as summaries for different administrative units in the Ottoman Empire: vilayets, nahiyahs, kazas and other territorial units. Such summarised statistical assessments do not allow for the tracing of the demographic development of the population of in different settlements. For this reason, in this research, only those Bulgarian or foreign statistics, which contain data at the settlement level are used.

The first attempt to systematically gather comparative detailed demographic information was done in 1878 by Metodiy Kusev and Georgi Gruev, who published in Istanbul the book „Ethnography of the vilayets Odrin, Bitola, and Thessaloniki“, printed at first as a feuilleton of the newspaper „Courrier d'Orient“, and later as a separate pamphlet (Courrier d'Orient, 1878). The publication consists of statistics about the male population of the three vilayets according to the payment register of the military tax of 1873 (bedel-i askeri), as this is the first publication in which the Bulgarians are noted on the level of different settlements. From this point of view, this data is a valuable source of the demographic and socio-economic history of the population of the Ottoman Empire. These statistics were presented



at the Istanbul Ambassadors Conference (December, 23rd 1876 – January, 20th 1877), and were also used for defining the borders of Bulgaria in the preliminary Peace Treaty of San-Stefano.

However, the statistics from „*Courrier d'Orient*“ have a number of flaws, as a result of the way the Ottoman Empire registered the population by certain traits. According to the established public practice, the population was differentiated by its religion: Muslims and Christians. For the first time in these statistics, it was indicated by ethnic origin for some regions. In most of the cases, the differentiation was only for the Christian population: Bulgarians, Greeks, Vlachs, and Roma, while all Muslims, no matter their ethnicity, were put in the same group. In other cases though, the Albanians were differentiated by their religion and in some villages, concerning the Albanian population, the categories „Albanian Christians“ and „Albanian Muslims“ appeared.

In the same way, for some regions, the usage of a different column, headed by the term „Pomaks“, was introduced. With this approach, the Ottoman administration recognized that, despite the fact that this population was Muslim, it was different from the other Muslims. In this case, the editors of „*Courrier d'Orient*“ noted in a remark that the people in question are „Bulgarians who converted to Islam, but still speak their own language and who have kept all their native customs“. Another flaw of these statistics, especially for the Bitola Vilayet, is that it is incomplete. There is missing information for several villages in the region of Mala Prespa that probably fall under the category „about 15 villages with unknown names“. Besides this, the town of Bilisht, the villages of Drenovo and Boboshticë in the region of Korçë, as well as the region of Gora, were outside of the administrative borders of the three vilayets, due to which there is also no information about them. (Appendices, table 1).

From the data presented for the 21 settlements that became a part of Albania after 1913, only Lin, on the western shore of Lake Ohrid, had a mixed population of Bulgarians and Albanians, and the remaining settlements were entirely populated by Bulgarians. The total number of male Bulgarian was 6,069 people, 1,310 of which lived in the Poletto area and 4,759 in Gollobordë. Most of the Bulgarian villages in Gollobordë and Poletto were mixed in the terms of religion. The villages Gorno Karchishta and Vorbnitsa were entirely populated by a Christian population, and Vladimerica (Lladomericë, Vladomiritsa) entirely by Muslims. In Poletto,





*Inscription in Bulgarian in the church „Saint George“,  
the village of Vorbnitsa, Gollobordë: Icon painter Dimo Ilov  
from Lazaropole. 1909, 10 August.*

the share of Bulgarian Christians was 56.5%, and in Gollobordë 44.5%. The village of Vrabnik, in the area of Kastoria, was also inhabited only by Bulgarian Christians.

The average number of men in the Bulgarian households<sup>6</sup> was 2.6 people. In the Christian villages around Debar, that number was larger (average between 3.2 – 3.5 men) compared to the Bulgarian Muslims (around 2.5).

Using the data from the statistics in „Courrier d’Orient“, which is based on the payments of the military tax, is difficult, to some extent, due to the fact that it counts only the male population. The Hungarian researchers G. Demeter, Kr. Csaplár-Degovics, and Zs. Bottlik resolve a similar problem by considering that „the numbers in the data should be multiplied by two for the total number of the population“ (Demeter, Csaplár-Degovics, and Bottlik, 2016). In reality, the share of the male population in this period should be less than the average, mostly due to more frequent mobility for working abroad and various demographic factors like male mortality.

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<sup>6</sup> In this context „household“ means a person or a group of people who live under the same roof – in the same house.

Despite this, using such an approach is justified, especially in cases where other reliable statistical data is not present.

Considerably more detailed, regarding the total number of the population in the villages that became a part of Albania after 1913, is the data from the statistics of Vasil Kanchov. In 1900, he published the second Bulgarian statistics for the population in the geographical area of Macedonia, in which, for the first time, data about the total numbers of the population (Kanchov, 1900) was presented. V. Kanchov was a teacher in the Bulgarian schools in Thessaloniki and Syar for many years, and from 1894 to 1897, he was a head school inspector for the Bulgarian Exarchate in Macedonia. His official status allowed him to travel and gather volumes of statistical data about the towns and villages in Macedonia, including their ethnic and religious composition. Besides his personal observations and research, Kanchov used the scientific research papers available to him and the travel notes of those who had earlier explored Macedonia – François Pouqueville, Ami Boué, August Grisebach, Pavel Šafárik, Joseph Müller, Victor Grigorovich, Johann von Hahn, Guillaume Lejean, Mackenzie and Irby, Gustav Weigand, Heinrich Kiepert and others.

The primary ethnic determinant in the statistics of V. Kanchov is the spoken language rather than religion. To him, the Pomaks are Bulgarian Mohammedans, not Turks, and the Bulgarian speaking followers of the Istanbul Patriarchate are Bulgarians, not Greeks. He employs such an approach regarding Vlachs and Albanian Christians too. The shortcomings in the statistical information of V. Kanchov are that they refer only to the population within the geographical borders of the region of Macedonia. Because of this, there is no data in it about the Bulgarian villages in the areas of Korçë and Gora, which after 1913 became a part of Albania. There is also no data about the villages of Konyovets (Koyovets), Vladimerica, and Orzhanov (Orzhanovo)<sup>7</sup> in the area Gollobordë which were inhabited primarily by a Bulgarian population (Appendices, table 2).

What makes an impression is that the Bulgarian villages are ethnically homogenous. The statistics of V. Kanchov also note the mixed character of the population in Lin in the Ohrid Kaza. As for villages with a mixed ethnic population, he indicates also Pasyanky and Dovolán in Gollobordë and Poletó and besides the Bulgarian Christians in them, there are also

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<sup>7</sup> The village of Orzhanov was considered for a long time to be a hamlet of Golemo Ostreni due to its proximity to the latter. Nowadays it has the status of a separate village..

respectively 100 and 130 Albanian Muslims. Smolnik is presented as a village with an Albanian population. One must take into account that the statistics from „*Courrier d'Orient*“ from 1878 about Pasyanky and Dovolan, besides the presence of Bulgarian Christians, also note respectively 12 and 53 Bulgarian Muslims, and also 33 Bulgarian Muslims living in Smolnik. During this period, the settlement of an Albanian population has not been registered in those three villages nor in later statistical inquiries, including Albanian ones. This population is noted as Bulgarian speaking; therefore this must be an error. Taking all this into account, at the end of the 19th century, the total number of the Bulgarian population in the data presented by V. Kanchov about the 28 villages that became part of Albania after 1913 is 10,742 people. Of them 2,055 live in Mala Prespa, 6,102 in Gollobordë, and 1,685 in Poletto. The residents of the village of Vrabnik with an exclusively Bulgarian population numbered 600 and in Lin, where the population is mixed, they were 300.

If we take for granted that in the statistics from „*Courrier l'Orient*“ from 1878, 50% of the population is male, in a period of about 20 years, we observe a decrease of 50.8% in the Bulgarian population in Poletto and 34% in Gollobordë. Most probably the reasons for this process are economic, as both the regions are high up in the mountains. In the village of Vrabnik, where the farming conditions are more favourable, for that same period we see an increase in the population of 36.3% and in Lin, the Bulgarian population is 66.7%. In the latter we also see an increase in the Albanian population of 141.9%.

In parallel with the decrease of the Bulgarian population in Poletto and Gollobordë, changes in their religious composition are also observed. At the end of the 19th century, the share of Bulgarian Christians in Gollobordë was 22.2% and this was a decrease of 22.3% in a period of 20 years. At the same time, the share of the Bulgarian Christians in Poletto was 48.4% and this was a decrease of 8.1%. The opposite is observed for the Bulgarian Muslims. At the end of the 19th century, their share in Gollobordë was 77.8% and in Poletto it was 51.6%. An increase of 22.3% and 8.1% respectively in a period of 20 years.

In 1905, the former secretary of the Bulgarian Exarchate Dimitar Mišev, under the alias Brankoff, published in Paris the book „*Macedonia and its Christian Population*“ (Brancoff, 1905) written in French. This book contains the third detailed Bulgarian statistics of Macedonia as of 1902.

It encompassed only the villages with a Christian population, its numbers and church affiliation, and also if there were schools at the time under the administration of the corresponding church institutions (Bulgarian, Greek, Serbian, Vlach) with the number of teachers and pupils in them. (Appendices, table 3)

The statistics of D. Mishev regarding the settlements with Bulgarian population that became a part of Albania after 1913 are also incomplete. Not only does it not contain information about Bulgarian Muslims, who were not a part of the school system of the Bulgarian Exarchate, the statistics lack data for a number of villages in the areas of Gollobordë and Mala Prespa populated by Bulgarian Christians. The existence of the Bulgarian school in Korçë is not mentioned (Appendices, facsimile 1). But one can make conclusions about the demographic development of the Bulgarian population that lived in them for the preceding short five year period through a comparison of the data for various villages.

The instability of the demographic development of the Bulgarian population in Poletë, Gollobordë, and Mala Prespa is notable. The total number of Bulgarian Christians in the villages Gorna Goritsa, Dolna Goritsa, Shulin, and Leska decreased from 667 people in 1897 to 584 people in 1902. At the same time, a rapid increase in the population of Gorna Goritsa from 285 to 360 people is observed, as well as a decrease in the population of Shulin – from 270 to 80 people. This is most probably due to migration caused by the instability of the Ottoman Empire. A peculiar characteristic of the population of Dolna Gornitsa is that in this period it was Patriarchist, and, therefore, it was not religiously embraced by the Bulgarian Exarchate.

According to the statistics of D. Mishev, the Bulgarian population in Poletë and Gollobordë for the villages he examined during the period between 1897 and 1902 increased from 700 people to 912 in Poletë and from 712 to 856 in Gollobordë. Here too, rapid changes can be observed due to migration of the local Bulgarian population. This affirms the conclusion for the instability of its demographic development.

The data about the conditions of the school affairs in several Bulgarian villages with existing schools (all of which are primary schools) allow for making partial conclusions for the age group 7-12. The Law for Public Education from 1891, which was also applied by the Bulgarian Exarchate in the schools it administered in the Ottoman Empire, states that primary



In his research, G. Traychev divides the students by their gender, which sheds some light on the age-gender structure of the population in this region at the time. In 1929, G. Traychev published the complete data for the Christian Bulgarian population for the school year 1911-1912 who lived in the villages that became a part of Albania after 1913 (Traychev, 1929). In the research, these statistics for the school year 1911-1912 are used as they offer the best view of the demographic development of the Bulgarian population that was just about to be included in the composition of Albania (Appendices, table 4). When analysing the age-gender structure though the statistics for the school year 1910-1911, this source was used.

According to the data from G. Traychev, there were Bulgarian schools in five villages in Mala Prespa: Pustec, Shulin, Glombochani, Gorna Goritsa, and Tuminec. The total population of those villages was 1,668 people. In the school year 1910-1911, in the Bulgarian schools, a total of 129 students were taught, out of whom 85 were boys and 44 girls. Given the relatively equal share between the male and female population of this age group, one can conclude that about half of the school age girls did not attend classes. This means that the total number of children in the age group 7-12 should have been at least 170 or 10.2% of the entire population.

The type of the farming engaged in had a great influence over the size of the Christian Bulgarian households. It is notable that in the villages where the land was owned by the villagers themselves, the size of the households is smaller. For example, the villagers owned the land they farmed in Vrabnik, Poletto, and Gollobordë, where the households comprised of respectively 4.9, 5.1, and 5.8 people on average. The situation in Mala Prespa is fundamentally different. Out of 9 villages, the villagers owned the land only in Pustec, and the rest were part of the chiflik system of land management. In this region, the households consisted of 10.1 people on average.

The statistics of G. Traychev show that on the eve of the proclamation of an independent Albanian state, on its future territory in the regions Poletto, Gollobordë, Mala Prespa, and Korçë, there were 27 settlements in which 6,751 Bulgarian Christians lived.

It is notable that the number of Bulgarians in Mala Prespa increased only by 77 people during a period of 15 years. Considering that, one cannot expect a significant increase in the village of Lin in the region of Ohrid for which G. Traychev does not present information. If the annual growth rate



among the Bulgarian Muslims was maintained over the years as calculated for the period between 1878 and 1898, then in 1912, their numbers in Poletto and Gollobordë should have been respectively 900 and 5,750 people.

Throughout the period examined, in the Bulgarian statistical studies, as well as in foreign ones, there are no detailed data about the population of the Gora region, part of which also became Albanian. The chronologically closest is the information given by Stefan Mladenov, who in 1916 was tasked by the Bulgarian Government to collect materials about the ethnography and the spoken languages of Macedonia and the Morava Valley (Mladenov, 1933). The results of the academic expedition show that in 1916, there were 628 houses in the nine Bulgarian villages that were part of Kukës Gora. The available statistical data from the period before the Balkan Wars for Bulgarian Muslims living in neighbouring high mountain regions show that the average size of their households was 5.5 people. With a certain degree of doubt, one can assume the number of Bulgarians in the villages in the region of Kukës Gora – Shishtavec (Shishevec), Borje, Oreshek, Cernolevo, Orgjost, Kosharishte, Zapod, Pakishta, and Ochikle – was 3,454 people.

Having this in mind, one can assume that the total number of Bulgarians in the settlements in Kukës Gora, Poletto, Gollobordë, Mala Prespa, Korçë and the village of Lin on the eve of the proclamation of an independent Albanian state and which after 1913 became a part of Albania, was 17,155 people, consisting of 40.9% Christians and 59.1% Muslims.

Some foreign publications from this period, also wrote about the Bulgarians in Albania. In his book „Albania“, published in 1901, Arturo Galanti wrote that „in Albania live 140,000 Vlachs, 150,000 Greeks, and 400,000 Slavs (Bulgarians and Serbs)“ (Galanti, 1901). Data about the presence of Bulgarians on the eve of the proclamation of an independent Albanian state can also be found in the statistics of Pierre Bernus about the population of Albania. These statistics were distributed at the end of 1912 by the International League for the Protection of People's Rights and according to them, the number of Bulgarians was 50,000 (Bernus, 1912).



### **1.3. Bulgarians in Albania from the Declaration of its Independence until the End of World War I**

After the Young Turk Revolution in 1908, there was a series of Albanian uprisings whose goal was to achieve independent administration of the lands populated by Albanians as a politically and culturally autonomous entity within the Ottoman Empire. In the summer of 1912, the success of the rebels' efforts forced the Ottoman government to concede and agree to terms for Albanian autonomy encompassing the vilayets Shkodra, Ioannina, Kosovo, and Bitola. With this act, the goal of the League of Prizren from 1878 was achieved, but due to the outburst of the First World War on October 9th, 1912, this Albanian political project was not realized.

On November 28th, 1912, Albania declared its independence from the Ottoman Empire with the Declaration of Vlorë. They elected a provisional government led by Ismail Kemal, who turned for help to the large European states to counter the strivings of Greece, Serbia, and Montenegro for the Albanian territory.

The founding of an independent Albanian state was recognized at the London Conference on July 29th, 1913, and the six great powers vouched for the new independent country. At the conference, the internationally recognized state borders were set. During this period, four regions in which there are villages with entirely Bulgarian population – Kukës Gora, Polet, Gollubordë, and Korçë with the village Drenovo and Boboshtica – were included in Albania. At the London Conference, the Bulgarian Muslims were considered to be Albanians. St. Mladenov writes: „The Gora region was added to Albania only because its residents were Mohammedan as were the Albanians around it, namely for their religious uniformity, not for their national propinquity“ (Mladenov, 1993).

On October 15th, 1913, the International Control Commission in Vlorë began functioning in Albania, which started taking steps for the foundation of government institutions and administration. Regarding the presence of a Bulgarian minority on the territory of Albania, the secretary K. Chekrezi wrote „in time Bulgarians (referencing the Bulgarian state's presence through the Middle Ages) were driven away, and those who had already settled were assimilated by the local population. Currently there are not many Bulgarian settlements in Albania, just a few villages“ (Chekrezi, 1919).

The first years of the existence of Albania as an independent state were marked by the emergence of various opposing political groups supported by the neighbouring states or by some of the great powers. This caused internal chaos that hindered the process of state development. During this period the Albanian Bulgarians fell under the influence of a complex system of reciprocal actions between various factors, among which the government's interests, the opposition, and the neighbouring countries stand out. Often at times of political changes and, respectively, the changes in the role of some of the participants in the events, a change in the attitude towards the Bulgarian minority was also observed.

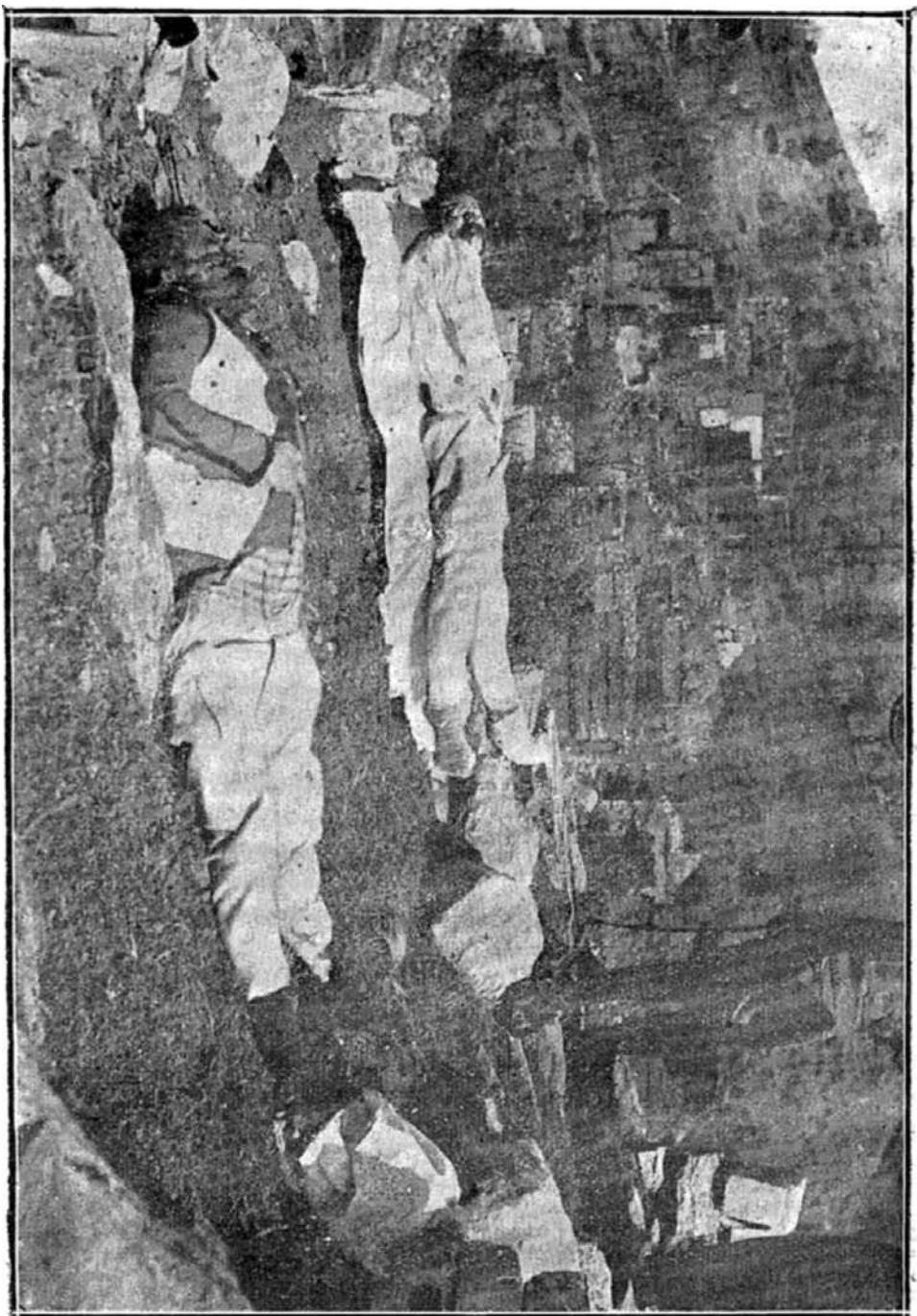
On May 19th, 1913, the Greek-Serbian „confidential declaration“ for the division of Albania into spheres of influence was signed in Thessaloniki. The dividing line was river Semani (Smirnova, 2003). Serbia took advantage of the outbreak of the Albanian-Bulgarian Uprising in Ohrid and Debar regions at the end of September, 1913, and when it was crushed, they carried out punitive actions in Gollobordë. According to K. Parlichev, „People were tortured to death or or just plain murdered by the Serbs... 13 people in Trebishte, 3 people in Klenjë, 2 people in Ginovec, 1 person in Tuchepe, 2 people in Golemo Ostreni... Houses were burned down... 2 in Trebishte, 1 in Ginovec, 123 in Klenjë, and 160 in Steblevo“ (Parlichev, 1917).

After this campaign from Belgrade, Serbian ambitions for reaching the Adriatic Sea grew and, in October, 1913, Belgrade began preparations for the occupation of Northern Albania, which were carried out on October, 17th.

In February of 1914, the so called Autonomous Republic of Northern Epirus was proclaimed with the help of Greece. It consisted of Southern Albania, which encompassed the regions Gërokastrë and Korçë. Within it, Athens exercised a strong political control and tried to pass off their own idea that the Orthodox Albanians – Vlach and Bulgarian Patriarchists were Greeks.

The tumultuous events in Albania and the fate of the Bulgarians residing in it were followed closely by the Bulgarian state. For this reason, in the fall of 1913 the Bulgarian Consulate General opened in Vlorë. Official relations between Bulgaria and Albania were established in April, 1914, when the Consulate General was moved to Durrës and its status was raised to that of a legation (Eldarov, 2000).

During this period, there was no active statistical institution to gather and process data about the population of the country. The uncertainty of the Albanian borders and the Serbian and Greek occupations of a large



**Three Bulgarians from the village of Klenje, killed during the Serbian invasion**

*Source: Parlichev, K. The Serbian atrocities in Macedonia 1912-1915 (1917)*

portion of Albanian territory did not allow for the gathering of accurate information about the number of the population of the Bulgarian minority. At first, in Bulgaria, the information that 43 Bulgarian villages fell within the borders of Albania with over 2,300 houses from the Debar, Bitola, and Kostur kazas (Pryaporets, 1914) was spread. It is obvious that this information is not correct and needed clarifying, and for this reason, on November 13th, 1913, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations sent the Ikonom<sup>9</sup> Tarpo Popovski from the village of Kosinec, in the region of Kostur, as vicar of the Ohrid-Debar Eparchy and Pavel Hristov from the village of Tsapari, in the region of Bitola, as a school inspector for the Bulgarian schools the the villages that became a part of Albania after 1913. Their task was to renew the Bulgarian church-school work that was active before the Balkan Wars.

As early as December 25th, 1913, in their reports, T. Popovski and P. Hristov note that after confirming their positions with Esad Pasha Toptani, the Albanian Minister of War and Internal Affairs, and Hasan Bey Prishtina, the Minister of Justice, Postal Services and Telegraphs, that they were free to move „throughout the whole of Albania carrying the necessary credential letters“. This was a period when the interests of the Bulgarians in Gollobordë and Poletë coincided with the interests of the Albanian government, as at this point, the two regions were being hit heavily by Serbian propaganda. For this reason, T. Popovski and P. Hristov wrote that they were in a hurry to inspect the Bulgarian schools in the region of Debar, emphasizing that the Albanian authorities agree to „ease their journey“. In the same document, they announced that they were also in a hurry to inspect the entire region of Debar „where there are 15-20 Bulgarian villages, until their objectives were completed“.

After T. Popovski arrived in Shkodra on December 30th, 1913 and noted that in the city there were „80-85 Bulgarians of different classes – in terms of families, they represented 7-8, besides those who had married women of Albanian nationality“. A characteristic feature of those Bulgarians who migrated to Shkodra was that they exercised free professions.

It is notable that the mixed marriages were only between Bulgarian men and Albanian women. Obviously, T. Popovski concluded that the mother tongue of the children in these mixed marriages was Albanian, and

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<sup>9</sup> *Ikonom* is the highest rank a married priest may attain

because of this, in the list he compiled, only 10 Bulgarian families with 36 children among them (19 boys and 17 girls) were noted. The average size of the Bulgarian household of those who migrated to Shkodra was 5.6 people – one mother had 3.6 children on average. This result is close to the size of the Christian Bulgarian households in Vrabnik, Poletto, and Gollobordë.

At the beginning of 1914, T. Popovski and P. Hristov visited Poletto and Gollobordë, accompanied by the IMRO voivode Grigor Oshavkov. When executing this mission of theirs, they left with „a recommendation from the Albanian Committee“ and in all the places they visited, they were „received well by the authorities who cooperated with them“. Hasan Bey Pristina even suggested that „40 Bulgarians from the committee (the IMRO, Ed.) in Sofia arrive, all the better if among them there were officers with Turkish passports disguised as people from Kichevo, Debar, Struga, Ohrid, Lerin, Kostur or elsewhere... The (Bulgarian Ed.) teachers should arrive the same way“.

After T. Popovski and P. Hristov completed their tour of Poletto and Gollobordë, in their report to the Bulgarian Consul-General Todor Pavlov, they presented information about the refugee processes caused by the Ohrid-Debar Uprising being crushed by Serbia. According to them, there were 10 refugee households from Poletto (around 55 people), and 138 households from Gollobordë (around 760 people), both Christians and Muslims. After discussing this with the Albanian leaders, it became possible for some of these Bulgarians to return. The political instability in the region in the following period was a precondition for those migration flows to continue, which led to variability in the number of the Bulgarian population.

Tarpo Popovski and Pavel Hristov reported valuable information about the state of the Bulgarian school affairs in Poletto and Gollobordë. They wrote that „there were Bulgarian schools before 1912 in the following villages: Makelare, Gorno Karchishta, Oboki, and Herebel... In the region of Gollobordë in the villages Drenok, Modrich, Vrabnitsa, Xhepishta, and Pasyanky<sup>10</sup>. In all the mentioned villages I visited, the school premises, the desks are still there, the blackboards, and in some of the schools even the archives. The only exception is the village of Pasyanky where there is no school, and for a school, a private house was used“.

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<sup>10</sup> After 1913 the villages Drenok, Modrich, and Djepishta were on Serbian territory (today in republic North Macedonia).



The preconditions for the success of the mission of T. Popovski and P. Hristov in Albania were present. On the one hand, the political rivalry between Bulgaria and Albania for Western Macedonia was not on the agenda, as it was obvious it could not have been carried out, neither by an independent Albania within the borders determined by the League of Prizren, nor by an autonomous Macedonia or its unification with Bulgaria. At the same time, due to the emerging and lasting repressive policy of Belgrade regarding the Bulgarians and the Albanians, Serbia was viewed as a common enemy, which caused the need for collaboration between the IMRO and the Albanian National Committee. The lack of funding however proved to be an essential setback in the work of T. Popovski and P. Hristov (Eldarov, 2000). As T. Pavlov notes, „The vicar of the Ohrid-Debar Diocese, Ikonom T. Popovski and the school inspector P. Hristov, who were sent by the Ministry five months ago, have not been given any remuneration or any kind of financial help by that same Ministry since their arrival in Albania. As I had the honour of reporting several times before, the two mentioned above were denied all funding and were forced to live off the compassion and charity of the several Bulgarian merchants in Duratso (Durrës, Ed..)“.

In April of 1914, five Bulgarian teachers arrived in Albania, sent by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations. Four of them were assigned to leave for Polet and Gollobordë, and one for the region of Korçë. Part of the duties with which they were tasked was to compile demographic statistics. It was entrusted to them „to compile statistics for the movements of students in the latest school year, to report the presumed number of students aged 7 to 12 for the upcoming school year,... to compile statistics for the Bulgarian population,... to report the levels of literacy among the Bulgarian population, to prepare geographical and ethnographic map of their respective regions“. This mission also failed as the region was near the border between Albania and Serbia and complete anarchy set in, due to which the Bulgarian teachers could not even reach the regions to which they were assigned.

The effort in the Korçë region was a little more successful, where with the assistance of the Albanian authorities, preparations began for establishing a Bulgarian church-school parish. On May 11th, 1914, in the village of Drenovo, Saints Cyril and Methodius Day was celebrated for the first time, and on June the 8th, in Boboshtica, talks were held with the population. The Bulgarian teachers were accompanied by the band of Delio Markovski, a



voivode of the IMRO, as well as Albanian officers and an Albanian bey. T. Popovski, N. Kirov and P. Hristov in their report to the Bulgarian Legation describe their visit to Boboshtica with the following words: „After the talks at the church antechamber, which went for more than two hours, Hristov and Kirov were invited to visit the more notable houses. Everywhere, they were accepted warmly and the conversations were personal. They were accompanied by the Greek teacher,... (who, Ed.) publicly admitted that the young child, who recited the Lord's Prayer in Greek in the church, did not understand even one word in Greek, but mouthed it like a parrot“. However, all hope collapsed when on June 23rd, 1914, Greek military forces crossed the Greek-Albanian border and occupied Southern Albania almost entirely. T. Popovski, P. Hristov and N. Kirov „along with the government people“ were forced to leave Korçë.

In the following period, the foreign political and military presence, the pressure exercised on the central Albanian government and the taunting of some of the local leaders were the main reasons for the changes observed in the status of the Bulgarians in Albania. From June, 1914, when the region of Korçë was occupied by the Greek army, the local Bulgarians were subjected to a systematic Hellenization. A lot of activity was also happening in Serbia. On October 2nd, 1914, they managed to support Esad Pasha Toptani enough for him to be proclaimed Albanian Prime Minister and Supreme Commander-in-Chief. Because of this, he completely changed his attitude towards the Albanian Bulgarians. In the following political crisis, Serbian troops entered Albania and after June of 1915, the Bulgarians in the regions of Gollubordë, Poletë, and Gora, not for the first time, found themselves under Serbian occupation for about six months.

This was the situation in Albania, when on July 28th, 1914, World War I broke out. The Great Powers took advantage of the anarchy in the otherwise neutral Albania, and sought to deploy their troops on its territory, thus increasing their grasp in the Balkans. With Italy joining the war on May 23rd, 1915, on the side of the Entente, the official Italian territorial claims for the city of Vlorë and the island of Sazani (Sazeno in Italian) were declared, and that Rome also wanted to establish as its protectorate „a not large autonomous neutral state“ in Central Albania. According to Rome, the remaining Albanian territories could have been divided between Montenegro, Serbia, and Greece, if those were the wishes of France, Great Britain, and Russia.

The implementation of this plan worried Austria-Hungary and because of this, in the fall of the same year, an Austro-Hungarian offensive towards Albania through Serbia and Montenegro commenced.

On October 14th, 1915, Bulgaria declared war on Serbia and the Bulgarian Army also took an offensive stance against Albania, with the goal of liberating Vardar Macedonia and joining the Austro-Hungarian Army, which took place in Elbasan. At the same time, T. Pavlov, who was the head of the Bulgarian Legation in Durrës, was recalled. Because of the Serbian occupation of a large portion of Albania, the secret archive and the cypher of the legation were destroyed (Eldarov, 2000).

On December 10th, 1915, the Bulgarian Army crossed Drin River, chasing away the remnants of the Serbian Army which had been crushed in Kosovo and on this date, the Bulgarian war-time administration of the better part of Kosovo and some regions of the internationally recognized territories of Eastern Albania started. Concerning this period, the Serbian historian Dushan Batakovic notes that large „masses of ethnic Albanians, who had been mobilized in the Serbian Army, became deserters, and many of them joined the Bulgarians, who gave them weapons“. At this time, the Serbian troops fell back through Albania to the Adriatic Sea, and the Albanian government of Esad Pasha was under heavy Serbian pressure, which led to him to send Albanian troops to fight „against the Albanian forces, who joined the Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian armies“ (Batakovic, 1992).

On August 18th, 1916, the Bulgarian Army captured Korçë and Po-gradec in a joint attack with the Austro-Hungarian forces against the Italian Army,. The Bulgarian offensive towards the Adriatic Sea strained relations with Austria-Hungary, because in the course of the military actions, a de facto situation different than the previously agreed line of demarcation was created, and Austria-Hungary insisted on instituting its influence and holding its power over the whole of Albania. The argument that arose not only created a dangerous crisis in the relations between the two allied nations, but also tension between all the countries of the Central Powers (Zlatarski, 2017).

Bulgaria was forced to gradually yield back some of the territories seized by the Bulgarian Army in the central and northern parts of Albania, except Gollubordë, and in the western parts of Kosovo, including the region of Gora, the Austro-Hungarian war-time administration was established. When S. Mladenov visited Gora in 1916, he informed the Bulgarian Government that „the Bulgarian authorities leaving Gora and the annexa-

tion of the region by Albania (meaning under Austro-Hungarian administration, Ed.) was the most important event for the local Bulgarians there since 1912. It is true that the Austrian military authorities in Albania are delivering food, but it is not enough and many of those, who have no money, are starving“ (Mladenov, 1993).

In order to counteract the offensive by the Bulgarian and Austro-Hungarian forces, in 1916, the Eastern Army of the Entente disembarked in Thessaloniki, commanded by the French general Maurice Sarrail and this is how the Macedonian Frontline came to be. In the eastern parts of Albania the dividing line between the Bulgarian-Austrian zone and the territory under the control of the Entente was along the line Pogradec – Berat, and in the south along the south arm of river Aoös, and the city of Vlorë and its surrounding region remained under the control of Italy. With minor corrections, the positions of the enemy armies of the two groups remained practically unchanged in these parts of Albania until the end of the war effort.

The changes that occurred in the region of Korçë in 1916 are of interest. On August 17th, 1916, the Bulgarian Army pre-emptively launched the Chegan Offensive which aimed at cutting off the initiative of the Entente. The next day, the Bulgarian Army captured Korçë and pushed the Greek garrison out of the city, where they were deployed even before the announcement in March, 1916, of the unification of the autonomous puppet Republic Northern Epirus with Greece. On October 25th, 1916, a joint Italian-French counter-offensive took back control of Korçë for the Entente and the new division line was from the city to the city of Bitola, and from there, on to Gevgelija. On September 9th, 1917, the French forces conquered Pogradec.

Aiming to avoid similar incidents between Bulgaria and Greece, a Bulgarian-Greek agreement for establishing a neutral border zone (The Times, 1917) was signed in the city of Korçë, in 1916. This frontline of World War I was located along of parts of the Southwestern border of the geographical area Macedonia. As border incidents in the neutral zone continued, French troops took control of it on March, 21st 1917. On March 27th, they were joined by the British Cavalry.

To prepare for the Entente's military operations, detailed research regarding the ethnic character of the population in the respective areas was conducted. In 1916, the East Bureau of the Army Headquarters of the Ministry of War in Paris published the reference book „Macedonia and the

Territories that Surround It“ (Ministère de la guerre, 1916). for usage by officials. Concerning Korçë, it noted that the population was „10 thousand residents, mostly Albanians and Vlachs, and some Bulgarians“. Valuable data was presented for the region around Debar as well. After 1913, the Debar region was divided into two parts by the new international borders. Gollobordë and Poletë became a part of Albania. The Ministry of War in France described Debar as a „city, situated on the Serbian-Albanian border, on the right- bank of the Black Drin River. It has between 10 and 12 thousand residents, populated by Albanians and Bulgarians (Muslim and Christian alike), famous for their rebellious character“. What makes an impression in the entire publication is the optimal impartiality of the information, which the Ministry of War strove to provide to the French Army, as this was an important condition for the military operations to be planned correctly.

A characteristic feature for this period was that „in the entire Southern Albania, and probably for the whole of Albania, the administration was carried out by the occupational armies“ (Scriven, 1918). The Austrian-Hungarian, French, and Italian command, in order to gain the sympathies and support of the local Albanian population, thus guaranteeing the safety of their rear, allowed use of the Albanian flag, the opening of Albanian schools, the appointment of Albanian officials and the operation of local government bodies under the control of the three countries given their status of war-time sovereigns.

On March 1st, 1918, the Austro-Hungarian administration conducted a census in the areas it controlled. The data gathered was published by Franz Seiner in 1922 (Seiner, 1922). This publication has not been researched by Bulgarian academics, probably due to the low number of Bulgarians recorded in it – 206 people, living primarily in the villages in Poletë. In the section about Gora, F. Seiner put 6,754 people in the column „Others“. For those people he gave the following explanation: „6,754 people are registered (by the census scrutineer, Ed.) as Macedonian Slavs, and they are a homogenous mass in the region of Gora of the district Xhuri, in the far north-east of the administered area. In the more detailed investigation, they gladly determined themselves as Bulgarians, and also more to the south, namely in the county of Dolni Debar, where 206 people comprise a small linguistic island; in this county another 537 Macedonian Slavs were registered“. This clarification by F. Seiner is really valuable as it shows that the people registered by the Austro-Hungarians as Macedonian

Slavs, identify as Bulgarians, meaning there is no conflict between regional and national identity.

However, in 2003, a team of scientists from the University of Graz under the guidance of Helmut Eberhart and Karl Keiser discovered that in 47 boxes stored in a warehouse of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, there were 435,075 original questionnaire cards filled out by the Austro-Hungarian administration, with 803,959 people registered during the census, which amounts to 54% of the population. The surface area of the Austro-Hungarian administration zone was 20,096 sq. km. out of the 28,748 sq. km. of the entire surface area of Albania or 70%. The census encompassed parts of the region of Polet, and the entire region of Gora, which were inhabited by Bulgarians.<sup>11</sup>

Checking the questionnaire cards a second time and looking at the indicators for ethnic belonging and spoken language, it is determined that besides Bulgarians and „Macedonian Slavs“, there is also a group marked as „Macedonians, corrected to Bulgarians“, the latter two, despite the clarification of F. Seiner, that Macedonian Slavs „gladly identify themselves as Bulgarians“, were not taken into account when specifying the total number of Bulgarians, but remain under „Others“. The research team that analysed the census data from 1918 suggests that „the Austrian authorities were not sure how to distinguish between Macedonians and Bulgarians“, which made necessary for the correction from Macedonians to Bulgarians. Again according to the team, the category „Macedonian Slavs“ were „primarily Muslims, who lived in the administrative unit Gora“.<sup>12</sup>

The villages in Polet, in which the census was conducted and that were within the internationally recognised borders of Albania, are Herebel, Gorno Karchishta, Makelari, Oboki, and Dovolani. (Appendices, table 5). By comparing the results of the census, published by F. Seiner in 1922 and the second processing of the data in 2003, with 54% of the questionnaire cards preserved, one can find drastic differences. For example, according to F. Seiner, the total number of the population of the four villages Herebel, Gorno Karchishta, Makelari, and Oboki was 1,103 people, while according to the preserved questionnaire cards, it is 1,190 people or 87 more, and

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<sup>11</sup> Since the London agreement of 1913, but de facto after 1925 the region of Gora is divided in two. Kukës Gora is in Albania, and Prizren Gora in Kosovo.

<sup>12</sup> Letters from April 24th and April, 29th 2019 from the members of the research team that analysed the census data from 1918, addressed to the author of this book.

at the same time, the number of those preserved cards is fewer than the original (for the village of Dovolan, in the second data processing in 2003, there was no data and this analysis does not include it). This data shows that the policies of Austria-Hungary at the time aimed at limiting the Bulgarian influence within the territories it administered, and resorted to erasing the Bulgarian ethnic identity of the Albanian Bulgarians.

As supporting a similar conclusion, the report of Y. Ivanov, in which two years before the Austro-Hungarian census he wrote that the Bulgarian statesmen have to clarify „due to what reasons... Gora was turned over to the Austrians” can be mentioned. Y. Ivanov pointed out that the statistical increase in the number of the Albanian population was justified by „a thesis for the preservation of the Albanian national integrity, put under Austrian wardship“. In this period in the Austro-Hungarian zone, a purge of the Bulgarian population began. „Now Gorani... feel foreign on the matters of their language and habits... their new masters from Austria... Gora presented proof of this with its refugees (from the Austro-Hungarian zone, Ed.), who moved to Tetovo, Skopje and other regions (in the Bulgarian Zone, Ed.)“ (Sefterski, 2005).

The tendency noted by Y. Ivanov for the decrease in the number of Albanian Bulgarians by the Austro-Hungarian administration is clear in what was reported by F. Seiner. The number of Bulgarians for the four villages in Poleto is 130 people. At the same time, if to this number is added the number of „Macedonians, corrected to Bulgarians“ and „Macedonian Slavs“, about whom he admits they self-identified as Bulgarians, but despite that, they were included in category „Others“, then the total number of Bulgarians in Herebel, Gorno Karchishta, Makelari, and Oboki after the second processing of the data in 2003 is 602 people.

It is really difficult to determine what part of the Bulgarian Muslims were presented as Albanians, and what part were immigrants from other regions or already Albanized. Some of these difficulties when identifying these people are to a great extent objective. As F. Seiner noted „in the provisional population census in 1916, it turns out that the Muslim Slavs, unlike the Albanians, who do not doubt their ethnic belonging and proudly call themselves „Shqipters“ (Albanians, Ed.), usually the concept of nationality and faith are indistinguishable“. However, the cross analysis from 2003 of the data for Poleto shows that 16 Muslims identified themselves as



Bulgarians.<sup>13</sup> Besides this, 10 Muslims stated they could read and write in Bulgarian.

Because of the obvious flaws which we have examined, the Austro-Hungarian census allows primarily for tracing of the variability of the total number of the population in the settlements that, according to the Bulgarian researchers, are inhabited by Bulgarians. When comparing the data, it becomes clear that while in 1912 the total number of the residents of the Bulgarian villages in Poletto was 1,620 people, in 1918 it decreased to 1,103 people, or by 31.9%.

A similar problem is observed in the statistical data about the population of Gora. The second processing of the data in 2003 shows that the share of national minorities there is the greatest of the entire Austro-Hungarian zone. The data from the Austro-Hungarian census show that in 1918, in the villages in Kukës Gora, inhabited by Bulgarians, a total of 1,783 people lived. Out of them 1,652 were registered under „Others“, but having in mind the aforementioned explanations, they were Macedonian Slavs, self-identifying as Bulgarians. One hundred and thirty one people were registered as Albanians (Appendices, table 6). When comparing the data from 1918 with the data from 1912, it is established that the population of the nine Bulgarian villages in Kukës Gora decreased by 1,671 people or by 48.4%.

The data from the Austro-Hungarian census from 1918 allows for making other demographic conclusions as well. In the second examination of the data in 2003, of the questionnaire cards which were preserved, it is determined that in Central and Northern Albania, the average number of children per mother was 3.6, while in the rural areas, this indicator was 3.7 (Gruber, 2004). This means that the birth rate among the Albanian population, albeit a bit higher than the rate among Bulgarians, cannot be a factor for the presence of Albanian demographic pressure over the Bulgarian minority. The decrease in its numbers is due mainly to migration processes, and not to replacement with an Albanian population.

France conducted a similar administrative policy in the south-eastern parts of Albania. In its status as bearer of the supreme war-time sovereignty, they organized a large scale operation, the most famous part of which and the one that received the most widespread reaction throughout Europe, was

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<sup>13</sup> At the present moment due to a lack of opportunity for access to the questionnaire cards, it cannot be determined from which villages those persons were.

the establishment of an autonomous province with Korçë at its center. It is viewed by some researchers as the Korçë Autonomous Albanian Republic.

When on October 25th, 1916, the French Army under the command of General Sarraill took back the control of the city of Korçë, this did not lead to the restoration of the Greek administration that had been forced out by the Bulgarian army. The French stay in the region was dictated by the danger of the emergence of an internal political struggle, Greece joining the Central Powers and this way, the Entente was to be in danger on the Macedonian frontlines.

According American Brigadier General George Scriven, „The French sector is smaller than the Italian and has fewer people. Within its borders are included Lakes Ohrid and Malik (north of Korçë, nowadays dry, Ed.) and the fertile valley around it, in which the city is situated. It is probably the richest city in the country (Albania, Ed.)“ (Scriven, 1918). The favourable agricultural conditions of the region suggest certain independence, and because of this, on November, 24th 1916, French officers held a meeting with Themistokli Gërmenji, who was a former member of the Albanian Revolutionary Committee and had a lot of interactions with the IMRO (Jacques, 1995). Gërmenji came to Korçë from Pogradec, which at the time was in the hands of the troops of Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria. The French officers appointed a committee of fourteen people – seven Christians and seven Muslims, who were tasked with preparing an administrative government for the Korçë region.

On December 10th, 1916, the commander of the district, the French colonel Henri Decoin and the fourteen Albanian leaders, signed a protocol with which they proclaimed an autonomous government over the region and it was put under the military protection of the French Army. According to article 1 of the protocol, the so called Korçë Autonomous Republic was comprised of the city of Korçë, as well as Bilishta, Kolonia, Opar, and Gora. Themistokli Gërmenji was appointed as prefect of the autonomous region (Schmidt-Neke, 1987). The fourteen member committee was transformed into an administrative council, responsible for maintaining order.

Appointing officials for the Korçë Autonomous Region was carried out by the French military authorities based on suggestions of the administrative council. A special Albanian mobile gendarmerie was created as well. It was responsible for guaranteeing the independence and the integrity of the territory. The power structures: police, gendarmerie, and vol-

unteer squads were under the supreme command of a French officer. The traditional flag of Skanderbeg was declared as the official flag of the Korçë Autonomous District and to it, the French tricolour banner was added. The Albanian autonomous authority of Korçë, besides the police and the gendarmerie, also created a system for postal services and issued postage stamps. On February 1st, 1917 the Albanian franc was issued as the local monetary unit (Popescu, 2013). The new autonomous authorities did not allow the Greek language to be brought back into usage in the administration and in its place, they introduced Albanian and French as official languages. The first schools teaching in Albanian were founded in the region. They were not allowed under the Greek administration.

During the period between March, 1917 and February, 1918, the chairman of the administrative council was Yani Dishnica. This change was followed by general M. Sarraill declaring new standing orders on September, 27th 1917 that cancelled the constituent protocol. The administrative council was replaced with an advisory council, and the number of members was decreased to 12 – 6 Muslims and 6 Christians.

The territory of the Albanian regions under the supremacy of the war-time French administration was enlarged in September, 1917, with the occupation of Pogradec. As a result of this expansion, it was divided into a Northern zone, with the administrative center Pogradec, and a Southern zone with Korçë as the administrative center. What is peculiar in this case is that the French government considered Esan Pasha Toptani to be the governor of the region of Pogradec with a local Albanian administration, that was also under supreme French war-time authorities, but also independent from Korçë.

On the French side, the delegated rulers of the Korçë Autonomous Region were H. Decoin (December, 10th 1916 – May, 11th 1917), General Sal (May, 1917 – June, 1919), and Reynard Lespinasse (June, 1919 – May, 26th 1920). The delegated rulers appointed French officers as officials, who would represent them in the consultative council. The first officer at this position was reserve lieutenant Barjeton, who in the middle of January, 1917, was replaced by lieutenant Sifrid.

In November, 1917, General Sal announced that the attempt at collaboration between Christians and Muslims was often difficult (Augris, 2000). At the end of 1917, T. Gërmenji was indicted for collaboration with the Central Powers, sentenced to death by a French military court, and ex-

ecuted in Thessaloniki. Due to problems that occurred, on February 16th, 1918, General Sal completely revoked the already limited autonomy of the consultative council of Korçë. When in 1918 G. Scriven visited the French occupation zone in Albania, he stated: „The French went even further than the Italians in Albanian affairs and last year they declared an Albanian republic in Korçë. However, during my visit to Korçë I could not find any traces of this. It seems that the republic has passed away quietly and naturally. It probably did not have the support of the people and was a forced attempt by foreigners, towards whom Albanians always look with suspicion“ (Scriven, 1918).

After the end of the World War 1 and the capitulation of the Central Powers, an agreement was reached that France would continue governing the Albanian territories under its administration. For this reason, the French Army did not leave Korçë until June, 21st 1920, when the power was officially turned over to the Albanian government.

During the three and a half years of the war-time French administration under the direct leadership of General Sal, an official census of the population of the Korçë Autonomous District was taken in 1918. Basic information was gathered from the residents of the other Albanian regions under French rule as well. The statistical data of this census was made public in 1922 by Jacques Bourcart, a contributor for the civil affairs to the commander of the Albanian territories administered by France in the First World War (Bourcart, 1922). Later the information was published in the bulletin „Revue de geographie“ (Revue de geographie, 1923).

According to J. Bourcart, in 1918, the population of the Albanian territories under the supreme war-time French administration was 122,331 people, divided by national and religious indicators as follows:

Ethnic/religious group	Total
Albanians of Muslim faith or Bektashi	82 245
Albanians of Orthodox faith	35 349
Macedonian Bulgarians	1 924
Romanians or Aromani (Armânji)	2 797
Nomadic Roma	around 500
Foreigners (Serbs, Greeks, French)	16
TOTAL	122 331

The information he presented about Bulgarians is exceptionally interesting „On the territory of Albania (meaning the French occupation zone, Ed.), only two villages remain where the people speak Bulgarian: Drenovo and Boboshtica in the Korçë valley. Only the elders speak Bulgarian, the young are completely Albanized and this is not at all because of some artificial influence, as Albanian schools were opened for the first time by the French administration.

In the territory of the neutral zone that was administered by France, Suha Gora and the shores of lake Prespa were inhabited by Macedonian Slavs whose language, outfits and adobe houses are similar to those in Bitola. There is a very clear distinction between the dialect in Suha Gora and the one in Drenovo and Boboshtica, and it may have survived like this since the time Old Bulgarian that was spoken in Ohrid. This is an interesting problem to be resolved by linguists.

The residents of Drenovo and Boboshtica wear Albanian Orthodox outfits, and not Macedonian (embroidered shirt, white cloth, multi-coloured apron and red socks) as the residents of Suha Gora and the valley of Zhelova“.

J. Bourcart describes the farming organization of the villages in the Albanian territories under French administration as follows: „A long time ago, a municipal organization by the Turkish administrative officials was created. The French administration expanded this organization. The Miftar, put at the head of every village, was elected by the families of the village, but he was never one of the beys. His appointment was proposed by the regional head from the council of elders in the village. One, or several like him, served as chiefs, fieldmen, who had the functions of state security officers. This organisation was extended to the Bulgarian villages in Suha Gora, who were serfs of the Albanian landowners.

In a special appendix of his book, J. Bourcart presented the data from the census of 1918 by settlement, the number of residents and their nationality, the number of houses and other statistical data. The French statistics aimed at being optimally impartial, and because of this, they represent a number of cultural traits. For example, within the Albanian population, there were different symbols for designating Christians and Muslims. For the Bulgarians there were also two symbols: B – for Macedonian Bulgarians and b – for the old (medieval) Bulgarians (Appendices, facsimile 2).

According to the French census, in the entire Albanian zone under supreme French war-time administration, Bulgarians lived only in the Korçë

autonomous district. In the statistical publication, the presence of medieval Bulgarians in the villages Drenovo (170 houses with 868 residents) and Boboshtica (193 houses with 1 177 residents) was noted. Their language, with the preserved Yus sounds, differs from the Bulgarian spoken by the Macedonian Bulgarians. For Drenovo, it was pointed out, that it was in the process of Albanization, and for Boboshtica it was reported that in the past, it reached 450 houses in size and that it was an ancient settlement with Venetian relics. The average size of the Bulgarian households in the two villages was 5.6 people, which is similar to the average size of the neighbouring Bulgarian villages of Vrabnik and Mala Prespa, where the villagers owned the land they farmed.

When analysing the data presented in the French statistics, it is notable that the total number of residents of these two villages, described as inhabited only by Bulgarians, was 2,045 people or 121 more than the total number of all registered Bulgarians in the region of the Korçë Autonomous Region. Also, despite the fact that, according to the Ministry of War in Paris, „a few Bulgarians“ live in the city of Korçë, their existence was not noted in the publication of J. Bourcart. It is obvious, that like Austria-Hungary, France also sought to decrease the numbers of the Bulgarian population.

Despite this flaw, the French statistics are exceptionally valuable with the information about the „neutral Greek-Albanian zone“. Regardless of the fact that since March, 1917, it was also administered by France, the French supreme administration did not have complete control over it, because of the military actions conducted on it,. From the 20 villages situated in the neutral zone, 18 were reported as inhabited only by Macedonian Bulgarians, 1 village was inhabited only by Muslim Albanians and 1 was mixed, inhabited by Turks and Roma. It was reported that one of the Bulgarian villages was destroyed during the military actions which took place between 1916 and 1917.

The 20 villages in question did not become part of Albania after 1913. They were situated to the east of the internationally recognised borders. This fact was still true in 1922, when the statistical information was published in France and for this reason, the region should not be examined as Albanian territory. But since the French administration oversaw the neutral zone as well, they decided to gather information about the people who lived in it. The data which was compiled later on, turned out to be of great importance, because of its conclusion that the population was not Greek. This



was the reason why, in one of the corrections of the Greek-Albanian border, 5 of those 20 villages became part of Albania in 1924: Cerye, Pustec, Shulin, Glombochani, and Gorica (Upper and Lower). These villages, along with Leska, Zarnovsko, and Tuminec comprise the region of Mala Prespa in Albania.

While carrying out its administrative functions, the supreme French war-time authorities were also supported by French academics and they conducted some research in situ. For example, the contributor for civil affairs to the commander of the Albanian territories administered by France, J. Bourcart, was a Doctor of Science. Another such distinguished French scientist was André Mazon, a graduate of the Sorbonne and the University of Prague. As an academic secretary at the Institute for Living Eastern Languages in Paris, he was mobilized in the fall of 1915 and sent to the Thessaloniki frontline where he remained until the end of the war. While he was at the front, he had the opportunity to listen in person to the local Bulgarian dialects and wrote down much folklore materials. In 1923, A. Mazon published his treatise „*Contes slaves de la Macédoine sud-occidentale*“, and in 1936 „*Documents, contes et chansons slaves de l’Albanie du Sud*“ (Mazon, 1923, 1936). According to him „the speech of the two villages Boboshtica and Drenovo, that are in Southern Albania, represents the endpoint of the western Macedonian dialects of the southwestern group“. By analysing the economic situation in the region of Korçë, A. Mazon noted that „thanks to its connections to the outside world, the economic and social situation in Boboshtica are significantly better than in the other Bulgarian villages in the region of Prespa“.

The conclusions made by the French administration concerning the presence of a Bulgarian population in the region of Korçë and to the east of it have played a huge positive role for this perception to be accepted by Albanian political factors. As early as 1918, during the preparation of the French Peace Conference and the necessity of defending Albanian interests, the Albanian N. Lako, apparently using the French data about the population of Albania, published a coloured ethnographic map of Albania in its borders from 1913 in Paris. In this map, besides Drenovo and Boboshtica, Lin, situated on the west shores of lake Ohrid, was also presented as a Bulgarian village.

When evaluating the population censuses taken on site in 1918 by the Austro-Hungarian and the French military authorities in the two Albanian

territories they administered, one must keep in mind that these are the only two demographic statistics of their kind compiled by non-Balkan states, let alone great powers. This evaluation, especially regarding the French population census, should be accepted as relatively unbiased, because at the time it was taken, France and Bulgaria were on opposite sides at this stage of the world conflict. The acquired data is official, because, by the power of international law, Austro-Hungarian and French military authorities were supreme war-time sovereigns in the regions that were under their control.

## *Chapter II*

### **BULGARIANS IN ALBANIA DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD**

#### **2.1. Changes in the Number of the Bulgarian Population in Connection with Adjustments to the State Borders of Albania. Territorial Differentiation and Specifics**

Even before the end of World War I, when discussing the future borders of Albania, the territorial claims of Serbia and Greece stood out. After the war ended in 1918, the better part of the Albanian territories were occupied by Italian forces and the eastern flank by French and Serbian forces. The claims of Italy and Serbia for ascendancy over Albania led to the emergence of various Albanian political groups fighting for power.

As a response to the increasing Serbian and Greek territorial claims, different Albanian circles started conducting their own ethnographic research in the disputed territories. Since a Bulgarian population lived in parts of them, its presence was reflected in their respective publications. In 1919, N. Lako published the book „The Rights of Albania“ in which he attached as appendices a coloured ethnographic map of the entire country of Albania and a similar detailed map of the region of Korçë (Lako, 1919). It is notable that N. Lako recognizes the presence of Bulgarians only in Korçë region and in the neighbouring area of Mala Prespa. The Bulgarians of Gora, Poletë, and Gollobordë, regardless of them being Christian or Muslim, are presented as Albanians. N. Lako is not very convincing when he wrote that „if the Albanians truly possess this ability to assimilate, they surely would not have missed to apply it on the Bulgarians, the Greeks or the Aromani who live next to them or even among them. As a proof of my previous claim, take the region of Korçë – in it one can find Bulgarian and Aromani villages“. Later on he writes that „in the region of Korçë we see two Bulgarian villages – Drenovo and Boboshtica about 5 and 9 kilometers southeast of the city respectively. The residents of these villages have kept their customs intact, all of them speak Bulgarian with the characteristics of their language. They did not manage to understand even one word in Albanian“.

During the same period, in order to win the sympathies of American public opinion for the Albanian cause, K. Chekrezi published the book „Albania, Past and Present“ in New York (Chekrezi, 1919). In it, not only does he recognize the existence of several Bulgarian settlements in Albania, but he also shows his understanding of the Bulgarian-Albanian ethnographic border in Macedonia. By describing the activities of the Albanian League, he comes to the conclusion that „it (the League, Ed.) has only changed its appearance and from a public political association, it has turned into a secret national society not unlike the Carbonari. In its latest form, the League arranged several illegal manifestations in 1897 during the Greek-Turkish war and in 1903, supported the Bulgarian Revolt in Macedonia“. On the same topic, the description given to the Bitola Vilayet is also interesting: „However, the Monastir (Bitola) Vilayet is inhabited primarily by Albanians and Bulgarians of roughly the same number, and the minorities are Aromani, Asian Turks, and Greeks, and there are no Serbs at all. The easy triumph of the Bulgarian armies against the Turks in 1912 and the London Conference, gave this vilayet almost entirely to Serbia“.

In his book, K. Chekrezi also published, but as a raster image, the detailed ethnographic map of the region of Korçë developed by N. Lako. In it, in addition to Drenovo and Boboshtica, Stropan, situated on the left bank of river Devol, is also marked as a Bulgarian village. The region to the east of Bilishta and Lakes Prespa and Ohrid is also marked as populated only by Bulgarians (Appendices, facsimile 3).

Again in 1919, the Albanian Dhimiter Beratti published his studies of Léon Lamouche, Bertrand Barère, Edith Durham, Elize Obri, L. Papiniu, and D. Colovani (Beratti, 1919). In the section titled „The borders of Albania,“ the statistical data from L. Papiniu about the number of houses and the population by vilayets, sanjaks (districts) and kazas was included. The following information about the Bulgarian population of the former Debar kaza is given: „The city of Debar has 2,350 houses with 11,750 residents, of whom: ... 450 Bulgarian houses with 2,250 residents; 715 houses in the Bulgarian villages with 3,575 residents; 3,025 houses in the mixed villages (Bulgarians, Albanians, Pomaks, and Turks) with 15,125 residents... 400 houses in the Pomak villages with 2,000 residents“. Some of those settlements are in the regions Poletë and Gollubordë, within the internationally recognised borders of Albania. About the Pomaks, L. Papiniu explicitly emphasizes that they are Bulgarian Muslims. In the Korçë kaza are indi-

cated „1,525 houses in the Bulgarian villages with 7,625 residents“. In Konia kaza it is reported that there are „40 houses in the Bulgarian villages with 200 residents“.

The mobilization of Albanian society regarding the foreign claims on Albanian territory within its internationally recognised borders bore fruit. In January 1920, the National Congress was convoked, and at the beginning of 1921, despite political opposition, an Albanian government was formed, and Tirana was announced as the capital city of the country. On November 9th of the same year, an ambassadorial conference, during which the independence of Albania within her borders of 1913 was affirmed, was held in Paris. (Frasheri, 1964).

During this period, diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Albania were not established, but instead, there were interactions between the IMRO and the Albanian National Liberation Movement. Ivan Mihaylov, member of the Central Committee of the IMRO writes „the Albanians had every reason to be adversaries of the Serbs. It is known that Serbia intended to seize all of Albania in order to have access to the Adriatic Sea. During and after the Balkan Wars, many Albanians were massacred by the Serbs. Throughout the first regime, the Albanians in Western Macedonia, those close to the borders of the country Albania, rebelled and together with Macedonian Bulgarian fighters in the same districts, brought havoc to Serbian armed forces and the police“ (Mihaylov, 1965).

In 1921, the first Bulgarian-Albanian Protocol was signed. It included the provision that „The Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, with the Bulgarians from Macedonia under occupation, and the Albanian Revolutionary Organization, with the Albanians from Kosovo and Macedonia, will strive to fight for the freedom of Macedonia in its ethnographic and geographic borders and for the liberation of the Albanians in Kosovo and Chameria“ as their agenda. In this document, it is written that „because the cities Ohrid, Struga, and Resen are primarily Bulgarian, they will remain within the borders of Bulgarian Macedonia. In Debar, a referendum will be carried out, the result of which will decide who will have this city“. On the Albanian side, the document is signed by Hasan Bey Pristina, Hoxha Kadri, Bedri Peyani, and Seifi Vlamasi. In his memoirs I. Mihaylov writes that „the talks had begun when the prime minister of Albania was Pandeli Vangeli, and continued when Hasan Bey Prishtina became the prime minister for a short time. They ended when Ahmed Zogu was prime minister. He

himself invited the negotiators to the house of Rexhep Bey Mitrovica, the Minister of Education. It was in this house that the text of the protocol was agreed to and written down. Ahmed Zogu had called 25 of the Albanian local leaders to listen in their presence to what point the negotiations were taken up to that point“.

Throughout the period during which Albania had no diplomatic relations with Bulgaria, Bulgaria sought to get information about the situation of the local Bulgarians through friendly foreign diplomats. For example in 1923, the Bulgarian Legation in Istanbul received data about the Bulgarians in Albania, gathered by the Italian Military Attaché, Colonel Vitelli. On this occasion, the prime minister and head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations, Alexander Tsankov, was informed that „the Italian military attaché... provided... the following intel: From the mouth of Boyana River to Lake Ohrid, there remained only one Bulgarian village, namely Lin... Between Lakes Ohrid and Prespa and south of the latter... there are many Bulgarian villages that seemed very poor. Greek priests serve in the churches of these villages, and in the village where there are schools... teaching is in the hands of Greek teachers. This was undertaken by the Greeks right after the end of the Balkan Wars and as of the present day, the priests and the teachers are intensely spreading propaganda in order to Hellenize the population. Because the border between Albania and Greece east of Korçë region has not yet been established, the Bulgarian population has distanced themselves from the Greeks, with an overt desire to remain under Albanian rather than Greek rule „.

On October 22nd, 1922 Bulgaria and Albania restored their diplomatic relations, but the exchange of diplomatic missions was delayed. It was not until the summer of 1924 that Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations appointed Ivan Ikonov as Bulgarian Consul-General in Tirana and he assumed office on January 11th, 1925 at which time, he officially notified the Albanian authorities.

This reawakening of reciprocal relations coincided with a period in which the Albanian borders were corrected. In order to settle the border disputes between Albania and its neighbours, based on a resolution by the League of Nations from September, 2nd 1921, a special Delimiting Committee was created. The first correction of the borders was on November 9th, 1921, when the line was altered southeast of Podgorica, following the valley around the riverbed of the Black Drin. On December 6th, 1922, a



dispute arose between Albania and Yugoslavia for the sovereignty of the monastery „Saint Naum,” situated on the south shore of Lake Ohrid, which continued for several years.

In 1924, corrections were made to the Albanian-Greek border as well. The attitude of the local Bulgarian population who lived in the border territories confirmed the information given by the Italian military attaché, Colonel Vitelli. Bulgarian representatives themselves insisted before General Parini, who was the chairman of the International Delimiting Committee for the Albanian-Greek border, that the area in question be included in Albania. In his memoirs, Mihail Ognyanov writes: „Having felt Greek tyranny, but also instructed by the IMRO, they expressed their wish to join Albania“ (Ognyanov, 2002). In this way, the village of Vrabnik and 8 other villages with a Bulgarian population in the region of Mala Prespa joined Albania. Greece acquired several villages from Southern Albania, that were populated by Greeks.

Before executing the border corrections, the Bulgarian ethnicity of the population of those villages in Mala Prespa was confirmed by the census of 1918 taken by the French war-time administration in the Korçë autonomous district. The Bulgarian ethnicity of the residents of Vrabnik was indicated by the local Greek authorities by the publication of evidence attesting to the local people's wish to migrate to Bulgaria, according to the provisions of the Bulgarian-Greek Migrant Agreement (Appendices, facsimile 4).

Before the correction of the Albanian-Greek border, in the village of Vrabnik and the villages in Mala Prespa Greece, a census was taken twice – one in 1913 and the second in 1920, the results of which were published in statistical collections (Ministère de l'économie nationale, 1915, 1925). If one compares them to the statistical information of G. Traychev for 1912, it can be concluded that for the period of the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), the population in the region decreased by 173 people. The data shows that the population of Mala Prespa in 1920 reached 2,356 people or compared to 1913, it increased by 397 people (Appendices, table 7).

The data from the two censuses from 1913 and 1920 reveal a heavily misshapen gender structure of the population of Mala Prespa. In 1913, there were 309 more men than the women. Despite that, by 1920, this difference decreased: There were 173 more men than women. It can be assumed the decrease in population comparing 1913 to 1920 is

strictly among the women, who most probably sought shelter in other regions, where there was no military activity. The lower number of women is a precondition for the diminishment of the reproductive capabilities of the Bulgarian minority in this region.

During the period from 1913 to 1920, a decrease in the population of Vrabnik from 429 to 366 people was observed. As well, a worsened gender structure was noticed at the beginning of the period. There were 29 more men than women. In 1920 the numbers of those two genders was practically equalized.

Despite the fact, that on January, 27th 1925, the borders of Albania were conclusively solidified by all of its neighbours, with the Florence Protocol on July 28th, 1925, Tirana and Belgrade corrected the border between the two countries by a mutual agreement. Albania on their side voluntarily yielded control of the monastery of „Saint Naum“, in exchange for acquiring two villages in the region of Peshkopi and the conclusive transition of several villages from Prizren Gora to Kukës Gora in Albania. Up to this moment, Yugoslavia treated these villages as part of their territory, due to which their population was included in the census taken on January 31st, 1921 (Total statistics of the state, 1932).

In this period the Gora Srez<sup>14</sup> was part of the Prizren district, and within it were the villages Borje, Orgosta, and Shishtavec, which became a part of Albania. The data about them from the census in 1921 shows that the total the population in the three villages was 2,103 people, out of which 1,169 were recorded to have Serbian as their mother tongue, 895 Albanian and 39 Turkish. The entire population was Muslim (Appendices, table 8). What is characteristic of this period is that Yugoslavia declared all Bulgarians in its territory as Serbs and the language spoken by them as Serbian. Y. Ivanov categorically states that the speech of the Gorani is Bulgarian, and not Serbian, because it is „analytical, having lost grammatical cases, without the vowel length characteristic of the Serbian language, with stress over the third syllable counting backwards from the end of the word. In usage, there are also nouns with the postpositive articles -ot, -ta, -ov, -va, -vo, etc.“ (Sefterski, 2005). In the Austro-Hungarian statistics from 1918, though these villages were registered as „Macedonian Slavic“, it is acknowledged that in more detailed interviews, these people identified

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<sup>14</sup> „srez“ or „kotar“ – an old Serbian (Yugoslavian) administrative unit.

themselves as Bulgarians. The most important argument, however, that the residents of the villages Borje, Orgjost, and Shishtevec were not Serbs, is the fact that Serbia gave the inhabitants up, along with the territory they inhabited, and turned them and the land over to Albania.

The comparison of the data for the three villages from the Serbian census from 1921 to the Austro-Hungarian census from 1918, shows great changes in the total number of the population and its ethnic composition. In 1918, the total number of the residents of the three villages was 1,156 people. In only three years, there was an increase of 947 people or 82%. At the same time, the number of the Bulgarian population was relatively stable. While according to the Austro-Hungarian administration, the Bulgarians („Macedonian Slavs“) numbered 1,102 people, according to the Serbian authorities their number (declared as „Serbs“) three years later is 1,169 people. We can assume that the difference is a result of their natural increase for this period. However, parallel to this, while, in 1918 the number of Albanians is 54 people, in 1921, it increased to 895.

In any case, this means a mechanical growth, but because of the time that has passed, it is difficult to restore the migration history in detail. In 2019, during research on site in Shishtevec, several of the elderly respondents shared that the 700 Albanians in question, who were registered in 1921, were immigrants from the inner parts of Kosovo, who, having in mind the uncertain status of the village, hoped to join to Albania. After the village was transferred to Albania in 1925 these Albanians left and the region remained inhabited entirely by a Bulgarian population.<sup>15</sup>

Since 1925, the borders of Albania have become permanent and have not been corrected, and with this, the process of the territorial separation of the Bulgarians living in the country ended. The regions and the villages inhabited exclusively by a Bulgarian population that comprise them were formed conclusively:

**Kukës Gora** region – 9 villages: Shishtavec (Shishtevec), Borje, Oreshek, Cernolevo, Orgjost, Kosharishte, Zapod, Pakishta, and Ochikle.

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<sup>15</sup> Such a version sounds plausible, because the village of Shishtevec is situated high up in the mountains, in a rugged terrain at an altitude of 1280 – 1360 meters. Besides animal farming, the climate in the area does not allow for agriculture, there is no vacant farmland, and therefore, no conditions for the permanent settlement of migrants from other regions. Even today, only the local Bulgarian dialect is spoken by all residents of the village.

**Poleto** region – 6 villages: Makelari, Gorno Karchishta, Dolno Karchishta, Oboki, Herebel, and Dovolan.

**Gollobordë** region – 16 villages: Steblevo, Klenjë, Trebishte, Malo Ostreni, Golemo Ostreni, Pasyanky, Ginovec, Tuchepe, Vladimerica, Konyovec, Radovesh, Orzhanov, Vorbnica (Vornica), Sebishta, Leshnichan, and Smolnik.

**Mala Prespa** region – 9 villages: Dolna Gorica, Gorna Gorica, Shulin, Cerye, Leska, Pustec, Zarnovsko, Tuminec and Glombochani (Globocheni or Globochani).

**Korçë** region – Boboshtica, Drenovo, and Vrabnik.

Besides the aforementioned, there are also two settlements, traditionally inhabited by a mixed Bulgarian and Albanian population – Bilishta and Lin.

Regarding religion, the Bulgarians in Kukës Gora are Muslim, in Poleto and in Gollobordë they are mixed, Muslims and Christians, and the share of the latter has been constantly decreasing. In Mala Prespa and Korçë they are Christians. Also, the Bulgarians are Christians in the mixed settlements of Bilishta and Lin. It should be noted, that in the religiously mixed regions of Poleto and Gollobordë, co-existence and close cooperation between Bulgarian Christians and Bulgarian Muslims is observed. In 1924, Jovan Hajivasiljevic published his book „Muslims of Our Own Blood in Southern Serbia“ in Belgrade, in which he paid special attention to some of the characteristics of the population of Gollobordë and Poleto (Hajivasiljevic, 1924). Despite the fact that his data has been commonly known since before the First World War, the conclusions about the interreligious relations of the residents of the two districts are exceptionally valuable. When describing the village of Steblevo, Hajivasiljevic emphasizes on the fact that there are no differences between Christians and Muslims in the names of the clans. In Steblevo, the Gruyovs, Kuchkovs, Bandevs, Gadzhovs, etc are indicated as Muslim clans. Analogically, in the village of Sebishte, the Muslim clans are indicated as the Dukins, Bachevs, Kolins, etc.

J. Hajivasiljevic came across interesting facts in Klenjë. „In this village, there is almost no difference between religions. I was told of people of both religions and I saw for myself, that in the village, there are about 100 houses and buildings, and 130 families and that in some buildings, Christians and Muslims live together. Like nowhere else, in this village, the

Muslims themselves openly say that their ancestors were Christian“. Most of the Muslim clans in the village carry names such as Mishkovs, Babevs, Despotovs, Zhugnevs, Smilevs, and so on. The religious propinquity and the diluted boundaries between the two religions is an essential peculiarity mostly among the population of Gollobordë, and this fact influenced the self-identification of the Bulgarian population throughout the following period. Bulgarian diplomats and researchers have come to a similar conclusion, and a partial one, only a few years later. The concept accepted during this period for the „cultural-religious“ rights of the Bulgarians in Albania leads to concentrating attention primarily towards the Bulgarian Christians, especially during the period examined. This flaw was not overcome until the 1930s.

Very indicative of the interreligious cooperation in Gollobordë is the inscription preserved on the outside wall over the entrance of the church of „Saint Nicolas“ in the village of Ginovec, built in 1911 on the foundation of an older church. In 2004, K. Todoroska recorded a legend according to which, when the church was being built, a wealthy traveller passed by, and he was surprised that some of the builders wore cloth caps and the others wore white fur-caps, meaning Christians and Muslim respectively. He asked them:

- What are you building?
- Well, a church, they responded.
- But why there are Muslims here?

Then one of the Muslim builders, Zekir Shutina, answered:

- We are brothers. This is how we build our churches and our mosques!

When the wealthy traveller heard this, he said to the builders that he would pay the master-builder to carve a commemorative inscription on a stone (Todoroska, 2014).

This inscription is quoted by K. Todoroska in the following manner: „Mashallah, wondrous unification. The village Ginevci“, but the author did not publish a photo of it. When visiting that same village, it was discovered that the name is written as „Ginovec“ (Appendices, facsimile 5). In this case, this is not just an inscription in Cyrillic, attesting to the „wondrous unification“ of Christians and Muslims. The usage of the symbol „Ѣ“ at the end of the name Ginovec shows that the inscription was in Bulgarian, a fact that Todoroska tried to conceal by replacing the original name of the village “Ginovec”, that according to the spelling rules used at that time, contains

the „inconvenient letter“ Ъ, with Ginevci – which is the demonym for the residents of the village.

Linguistically speaking, the villages in Albania populated by Bulgarians are west of the Yat isogloss belt, which means they are in the area of the western Bulgarian dialects.<sup>16</sup> However, substantial regional differences are observed regarding the reflexes of the Old Bulgarian nasal back vowel (Ѣ). Considering this, the Bulgarian dialect in Kukës Gora is part of the [u]-dialects, the dialect in Poleta and Gollobordë is part of the [ɔ]-dialects, and the dialects in Mala Prespa are part of the [ɤ]-dialects. (ɤ – the pronunciation of the letter „u“ in American English in „plus“). The dialect in the village of Vrabnik also is a part of the [ɤ]-dialects, but with elements of nasal pronunciation. Even more noticable is the nasal pronunciation in the villages Drenovo and Boboshtica in the Korçë region.

Old Bulgarian	Pronunciation (represented in IPA) in			
	Kukës Gora	Poleta and Gollobordë	Mala Prespa	Vrabnik
рѣка	[ruka]	[rɔka]	[rɤka]	[rɤnka]
пѣтъ	[put]	[pɔt]	[pɤt]	[pɤnt]
зѣбъ	[zub]	[zɔb]	[zɤb]	[zɤmb]

Characteristic for the demographic development of the Bulgarians in Albania during this period is that no substantial difference is observed in the demographic indicators between them and their Albanian neighbours. The different religious affiliation of the separate Bulgarian communities also does not evidently influence those indicators. This conclusion can be made based on the statistical information provided by L. Papiniu from 1919, as well as the French census in the Korçë Autonomous District in 1918, regarding the size of the households. This data overlaps with the information from the Austro-Hungarian statistics from 1918 about the average number of children per woman, and from which one can estimate the size of the households.

The first official census of the population of Albania was taken in 1923. It was determined that the population in the country was 814,380 people, living in 143,065 households. The average household consisted of 5.7 people, which is close to size of the average household in the villages

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<sup>16</sup> In the western Bulgarian dialects, on the places where the Old Bulgarian vowel yat (Ѣ) was used, nowadays the sound [e] is pronounced.



populated by Bulgarians. Based on this data, it can be presumed that the factor „Albanian demographic pressure“ during this period no longer existed, and the demographic processes among the Bulgarian minority in Albania throughout this and the following periods were affected primarily by political and economic factors.

## **2.2. Socio-political situation of the Bulgarian minority in Albania and actions for its official recognition**

The provisional Albanian government with Turhan Pasha Permeti at its head, who was supported by the Italians, was not elected until the end of 1918. However, political instability still ruled the country, combined with attempts of foreign influence, and because of this several governments existed for short periods of time in parallel or were replaced after short intervals.

After diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Albania were restored and the exchange of diplomatic representatives, throughout the entire year 1925, the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana restrained itself from taking official actions before the Albanian government on the matter of the civil rights of the local Bulgarian population. One of the main reasons was the lack of reliable evidence for the particular needs of our fellow countrymen in Albania (Eldarov, 2000). At the same time, the matter of the Bulgarians in Albania and their rights once again arose after 1924. On the one side, this is related to the correction of the Albanian state borders and the inclusion of villages from several regions with an entirely Bulgarian population, and on the other side, the establishment of the diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Albania.

For the first time, the initiative for the official recognition of the Bulgarians in Albania formed within the local population of Mala Prespa, and the primary consequence of this should be the opening of schools, where instruction is in the Bulgarian language. For this purpose, a group of Bulgarians from this region turned to the Ministry of the National Education in Sofia on September 1st, 1925, with a petition to send Bulgarian teachers to them, who would teach their children to read and write in Bulgarian and keep the Bulgarian spirit alive. In a confidential letter of the Ministry of National Education from November 11th, 1925, the information about the

request of the Bulgarian villages in the Korçë region for Bulgarian teachers was passed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations, which in turn, tasked the head of the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana, Ivan Ikonov, to research on site the possibility of satisfying the request of the Bulgarians in Mala Prespa.

For this reason, I. Ikonov talked to the Albanian Minister of Interior, Ilias Vrioni, with his Chief Secretary, Jafer Vila, and with the Director of National Education, with whom he discussed the possibility of opening Bulgarian schools in Albania. In a confidential report from April 7th, 1926, I. Ikonov announced that the Minister of the Interior told him that „in principle, our request for assigning Bulgarian teachers to the Bulgarian population in Southern Albania faces no obstacles and the government is looking actively into the matter and its practical application“. For this reason, Minister Vrioni promised to draft a law that would settle the matter in accordance with the Pact for the Minorities. The information about the upcoming draft of such a law that would settle the question of the education of the minorities in Albania is also confirmed by the Director of National Education. In his report, I. Ikonov quotes the words of the Director of the National Education: „Being born in Ioannina, now in Greece, I know the Greek ambitions for Southern Albania well. We do not have an interest in forming a strong barrier between us and the loyal population living inside our border. We have an interest in satisfying the Bulgarian population“.

On May 7th, 1926, I. Ikonov informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations of the latest talks he had with Minister of the Interior Vrioni, according to whom the Albanian government was already near the end of developing a bill about the education of minorities in Albania, which would soon be introduced to the cabinet and later to the parliament. The Albanian state's views are that satisfying the request for teachers for the Bulgarian population and for the teaching of the lessons in the mother tongue would happen within the framework of the Albanian school program, and a certain number of classes would be dedicated to the Bulgarian language weekly. Regarding this, I. Ikonov passed the confidential information that the bill was targeting the independent minority schools, for example the ones that the Greeks have in Southern Albania. In this way, the Albanian government aimed to stop foreign influences, but the Bulgarians in Albania would become hostages in the outcome these actions.

On May 28th, 1926, I. Ikonomov asked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations to take action for finding the proper people to be Bulgarian language teachers from the respective Macedonian emigrant brotherhoods in Sofia. However, this request of his remained unanswered, and because of this, Bulgaria turned out to be unprepared for the upcoming development.

A year after the Bill for National Education in Albania was drafted, it still was not discussed in the two legislative chambers of the Albanian government. Due to these conditions, the chief director of national education assured the head of the Bulgarian Legation that this would not hinder the settling of the matter of studying in the Bulgarian language in the schools in the villages with a Bulgarian population in Southern Albania. After a thorough discussion, an agreement was reached, according to which the Head of the Department of Education in Albania, through inspections of the local school, would immediately gather accurate data, whether there were appropriate people among the Bulgarian population, who could be appointed as teachers in Bulgarian. Especially important is article 2, which stipulates that „in case it turns out there are none available, then the residents will appoint appropriate people from their fellow countrymen, who at the time live outside of Albania, and these people will be presented to the local school authorities for approval“. These teachers would be officially included in the Albanian schools system and will follow the Albanian educational curriculum, and at the same time, they would be tasked with teaching in Bulgarian in some of the classes during the week. By not presenting such appropriate people from the circles of the Prespa Brotherhood, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations effectively failed the initiative of I. Ikonomov.

On April 24th, 1927 – the first day of Easter – the head of the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana was visited by the head of the Ministry of the Interior and Financial Minister Fejzi Alizoti. He told him that the Cabinet of Ministers of Albania discussed the request presented for appointing teachers, who would teach in Bulgarian in the schools in the Bulgarian villages and that „The cabinet responded favourably to this matter“. Once again, I. Ikonomov insisted that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations contact the respective Macedonian Brotherhoods in Sofia to find appropriate people to be Bulgarian teachers. Besides this, he requested to be allowed to send the translator of the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana,

Lazar Popovski, to the Bulgarian villages in the Korçë region and there on site to clarify who the people that the villages would present to the Albanian authorities were as appropriate to teach in the Bulgarian language. I. Ikonomov explicitly emphasized otherwise there would be a danger that the Bulgarian teachers would not be allowed to enter Albania under any pretence, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations in Sofia once again did not take any specific actions following the development of the situation.

In the light of the passivity of the Bulgarian state during this period, the IMRO tried using their own means to preserve and support the Bulgarian self-consciousness of the Albanian Bulgarians. After restoring its work after the end of the First World War, the IMRO displayed great interest in and for Albania. The organization managed to arrange the appointment of Lazar Popovski, son of its member Archpriest *Ikonom*<sup>17</sup> Tarpo Popovski, as the legation translator. By skilfully using the prestige of the organization, his own abilities and his father's connections, L. Popovski managed to infiltrate the Albanian political and military elite quickly and easily. He quickly established contact with senior officers from the Albanian Army. He formed friendly relations with the Minister of Interior, and when, in October of 1925, the latter resigned, Popovski easily managed to gain access to his successor. He was also close to the Chief of the Gendarmerie. These contacts were extremely useful for the unofficial functions of Popovski and the Albanian projects of the IMRO. Thanks partially to those contacts, in October of the same year, the Albanian government ignored the joint request of Yugoslavia and Greece to hand over to them all the refugees and revolutionaries who fled their respective countries illegally and at the time were residing undisturbed in Albania (Eldarov, 2000).

The cultural-educational policy of the IMRO became especially of interest. After restoring its revolutionary activity, and in its first circular from June 11th, 1920, to the station chiefs regarding the situation in Aegean Macedonia, it is stated that „the organization will consider its primary and immediate task of preserving the national self-consciousness and name of the Bulgarian population there and seek ways for it not to emigrate“.

A similar policy was undertaken by the IMRO regarding the Bulgarians in Albania. In a strictly confidential statement on July 26th, 1926, by

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<sup>17</sup> *Ikonom is the highest rank a married priest may attain.*

Pero Shandanov to the Central Committee and to the Foreign Delegation of the IMRO, the necessity of providing minority rights to the Bulgarian population was pointed out: „Under Albanian rule are around 22 Macedonian villages inhabited only by Bulgarians. I reckon that the Bulgarian Government, in accordance with the peace treaties, is obliged to take care of the fate of those villages. Since bringing this question forward by the Bulgarian Government would cause a storm of indignation among the Serbian political circles, I think that the Bulgarian Government, in its desire not to irritate the Serbian one, will not bring the aforementioned question up. However, resolving this matter would greatly benefit the population in a moral way and, for us, it would be of tactical significance, and because of this the IMRO is obliged to intervene with all of its energy and power to resolve the matter“.

Within the framework of what was agreed on in the Tirana Protocol of 1921 about Bulgarian-Albanian cooperation, Albanian political factors have treated the Bulgarian minority favourably. Since Poletto, Gollubordë and Mala Prespa were viewed as a part of the geographical area of Macedonia during this period, the Albanian authorities did not stand in the way of the expression of Bulgarian national self-consciousness among the people residing in the regions.

In order to study the conditions for developing activities in Albania, the IMRO sent the Bulgarian film director, theatrical pedagogue, theatre expert and dramatist of Jewish descent, Boyan Danovski, to Albania undercover, as a journalist. In his report to the Central Committee of the IMRO from 1927, he made the important conclusion that „in this whole mess, Bulgaria is not regarded by anyone because of the two boogymen: Italy and Serbia<sup>18</sup>. Everyone is very grateful to us and that is it... So the Macedonian Movement cannot expect serious support until the community there calms down from its nightmares“.

The situation that was created in Albania was analysed in a letter by Georgi Pophrstov to the Central Committee and the Foreign Delegation of the IMRO, sent from Durrës on August 11th, 1927. G. Pophrstov examined Albania as „natural base“, but explicitly stressed that „to a certain extent, we ourselves are at fault that we cannot solidify our positions here“. As a

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<sup>18</sup> In 1918 the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians was founded and in 1929 it was renamed to Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Since the state was strongly politically dominated by Serbs, in this period in different documents were used all three country names.

measure to overcome this flaw, he himself proposed to take up the organization of „our Bulgarian villages“. For this purpose, he made „all villages submit a request to the authorities that they wanted Bulgarian teachers“.

In the statement of Peco Traykov to the Central Committee of the IMRO from November 21st, 1927, it was proposed „to influence the Bulgarian Government to take steps for the opening Bulgarian churches and schools, unlike those the Albanian government is willing to provide, as long as the steps taken are through the official channels of the Bulgarian Government. In this way, a closer bond with the Albanian people will be created, among whom we have many friends and followers“.

From this document, it is apparent that according to the IMRO, the Bulgarian Government did not do everything necessary to defend the rights of the Bulgarians in Albania. In a statement, Peco Traykov submitted information that „Ahmed Zogu does not frown upon our organization (the IMRO, Ed.), but also he does not favour us.“ The latter is due to the vile activities of (Lazar, Ed.) Popovski, who to a great extent, had him fooled about our deeds, constantly scaring him that we are his greatest enemy and that we are stalking him in order to murder him“.

The following events show that, with these statements of his before the Albanian authorities, L. Popovski aimed to distract their attention from his own agenda. This situation to a great extent was due to the internal conflict within the IMRO between the followers of Ivan Mihaylov and the followers of General Protogerov. L. Popovski at first was affiliated with the Protogerov wing, but gradually transferred his allegiance to IMRO (United), which was controlled by the Comintern. In the spring of 1928, an attempt to assassinate Ahmed Zogu was uncovered in Albania, while he was still officially the president of the republic. During the investigation, it was established there was a significant Bulgarian participation in the plot, closely related to the Comintern. The conspiracy was led by the translator of the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana, L. Popovski.

This forced the Bulgarian diplomatic personnel to be entirely replaced and the head of the legation I. Ikononov was replaced by Apostol Grezhov. With the participation of Bulgarian diplomats in the plot to assassinate A. Zogu, not only were the efforts to recognize the Bulgarian minority in Albania and grant it cultural and educational rights ruined, but also the local Bulgarians were persecuted by the authorities. For example, in the village of Vrabnik, the houses of the more notable Bulgarians were searched by



the police and the Bulgarian primers and newspapers were confiscated and the prefect of Bilishta issued an order for the arrest of six people and fined them each with 50 golden francs, just because they restored the erased Bulgarian inscriptions on the icons in the village church.

Despite the diminished prestige of Bulgaria and the reinforced suspicion of the Albanian authorities towards Bulgarians, the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana and the IMRO continued to be active among the Bulgarians in Mala Prespa, Gollobordë, Poletë, and Vrabnik. In connection to the arrival of the Bulgarian school inspector Dimitar Iliev in Tirana, the newly appointed head of the Bulgarian Legation, Apostol Grezhov, wrote on August 14th, 1928, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations that „One of the most important matters that must be resolved as soon as possible between the Bulgarian and the Albanian governments is the matter of the schools and churches in the Bulgarian minority settlements in Albania. This matter, the way I understand it from the correspondence, was picked up by the former head of the legation, but remained hanging, unresolved“. The conclusion reached by A. Grezhov after probing the opinions and speaking to notable Albanian citizens was that: „Although the competent circles seem to be favourably pre-disposed to resolve this matter, they still seek ways of prolonging it“.

In October, 1928, Srebren Poppetrov arrived in Tirana as the Chief Inspector-Organizer of the Church-School Affairs of the Bulgarians in Albania. However, the apathy and the lack of a professional approach by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations was an obstacle for resolving the issues which were piling up. On one side, the school inspector D. Iliev, although born in the region of Debar, not only did not speak Albanian and was not an Albanian national, but he also did not speak any Western European language, especially French, in order to be capable of communicating with the Ministry of Education in Tirana and his other inspector colleagues. On the other side, the Bulgarian Legation did not have any information from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations about the appointment of S. Poppetrov, due to which it did not know whether he was a state official or a civilian worker and what his functions and relations with the legation would be. It was unknown how he should be introduced to the Albanian authorities. Such instructions were sent from Sofia as late as November 13th, 1928.

Despite the difficulties, the newly appointed personnel of the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana closely followed the processes taking place in Alba-

nia and its neighbouring countries. In a confidential report by the legation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations on November 10th, 1928, it is stated that „The Bulgarian villages that remained in Albanian territory do not have great quantitative and qualitative importance... But they are much more significant in another way – POLITICAL... If the villages in Albania on the border with Serbia and Greek Macedonia are preserved as Bulgarian, as they are now, they would be the most irrefutable proof that the population that remained outside of the Albanian border is also of the same nationality... This irrefutable fact would be able to be used by the Bulgarian diplomacy at the right moment“.

The cultural self-preservation and confirmation of the Bulgarians in Albania was viewed as one of the most basic tasks of the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana. Regarding this, the local Bulgarian population was urged to officially request its church-school rights. On December 15th, 1928, the mayor of the village of Vrabnik, the two municipal councillors and 37 other people signed a request for the Ministry of Education in Tirana to be allowed to open a school with instruction in the Bulgarian language. Later, similar requests for opening Bulgarian schools and churches where the liturgies would be served in Bulgarian, were submitted by the villages of Tuminec, Gorna Gorica and Dolna Gorica in the region of Mala Prespa. All the demands of the Albanian Bulgarians remained unanswered.

In 1929, the same request to the Albanian authorities was submitted by the residents of the village of Klenjë in the region of Gollobordë. In the same period, Bulgarians from Polet and Gollobordë, living in Bulgaria as „foreign workers, refugees, and migrants“, founded the association „Saint John the Baptist“ (Appendices, facsimile 6). Its agenda is specified in the personal correspondence with the motherlands; showing moral support to the Bulgarians living there; providing material support to the schools and the churches; sending school textbooks, scientific and otherwise helpful literature for the students and the schools, church items and clergymen clothes, and gathering materials of the past history of these regions. The Bulgarian books and textbooks sent during this period additionally mobilized the Bulgarians in Albania to defend their cultural and educational rights.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the negative consequences from the Bulgarian participation in the plot to assassinate A. Zogu, at the end of the 1920s and the beginning

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<sup>19</sup> During research on site in 2019, I encountered people who still keep part of these Bulgarian books and textbooks.

of the 1930s, Bulgarians and Albanians once again displayed their wish to mutually get to know each other and become closer. In the spring of 1929, the head of the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana, A. Grezhov met with Rauf Fico, who had resided for a long time in Belgrade and in Sofia as the Albanian Minister Plenipotentiary. During this conversation, the attitude of the Albanian authorities towards the local Bulgarians was discussed.

In his position, R. Fico stated that the current situation is due to the biased views on the Albanian side, and not to Serbian or Greek machinations (Bobev, 1985). Similarly, the Albanian position is that the bad disposition towards the Bulgarians in Albania had to be gradually overcome. In the spring of 1931, changes occurred in the government in Tirana and R. Fico was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs. At the end of April, the provisional head of the Bulgarian Legation Hristo Minkov met with him and the matter of the attitude of the official Albanian authorities toward the local Bulgarians and granting them minority rights was discussed again. The Albanian Minister of Foreign Affairs committed to put an end to all the incidents.

A direct consequence of the process that started to bring Bulgarians and Albanians closer together, in contrast to previous years, during the Easter liturgy in the cathedral in Tirana in 1931, in addition in Albanian, the Gospel was also read in Old Bulgarian. During that same year, the Bulgarian newspapers „Zora“ and „Macedonia“ and the weekly newspaper „Illustrated week“ were available, in addition to Greek, Serbian and other newspapers for readers in Albania. The official distribution of these newspapers visibly uplifted the spirit of the Albanian Bulgarians. The portrait of the Bulgarian Tsar was displayed in the Bulgarian houses and shops, and the local Bulgarians came to the Bulgarian Legation without fear of persecution.

About these conditions, a confidential report by Srebren Poppetrov to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations from June, 1931, stated that „Bulgaria... made an effort, sacrificed great material resources aiming to prepare the reinstitution of the church-school rights of the Bulgarians in Albania. What is left to be clarified is the question: Is the Bulgarian minority recognized and will it be given national rights in Albania?“

Results regarding this were also not late in coming. At the end of 1931, the Second Balkan Conference was held in Istanbul and Ankara. One of the resolutions that was ratified during it provided for the realiza-

tion of bilateral meetings on the subjects of the most burning problems in the Balkans. On January 9th, 1932, delegations from Bulgaria and Albania signed a final protocol in Sofia, in which article 1 stated that „the Albanian delegation recognizes the existence of a Bulgarian minority in Albania“.<sup>20</sup> Article 3 stated that „the Albanian delegation takes on the duty of addressing its government in order to allow the opening of Bulgarian schools in the towns and villages where the Bulgarian population is predominant. In these schools, the classes would be taught in Bulgarian language, and studying Albanian will be compulsory“ (Appendices, facsimile 7).

The agreement which Bulgaria and Albania reached caused satisfaction among the Macedonian emigrant circles in Bulgaria. On this occasion, the body of the Macedonian emigration and its organ the newspaper „Macedonia“, stated that „concerning the application of the resolution of the Second Balkan Conference, held in Istanbul, there has been a meeting recently lately in Sofia between the Albanian delegation, consisting of Mehmed bey Konica, Dr. Fuad bey Aslani and Iskender Konica, and the Bulgarian delegation, consisting of Yanko Sakazov, Andrey Toshev, professor Georgi Genov, Dimitar Milev, and professor Ivan Georgiev, who after several meetings remained in agreement to express wishes to their respective governments to apply the agreement clauses concerning minorities in both countries – the Bulgarians in Albania and the Albanians in Bulgaria. The duly constituted and signed final protocol for the purpose will be made public after it is delivered to the two respective governments“ (Macedonia, 1932).

In March of the same year, the newspaper „Macedonia“ published information about a lecture by Dr. Boris Petkov, in which he emphasized the significance of the Albanian-Bulgarian Protocol. The newspaper also published the fact that there were around 30 Bulgarian settlements on Albanian territory with 7,500 people living in them, and around 20,000 Bulgarians Pomaks, speaking fluent Bulgarian, with a developed national consciousness, on the territory of the Albanian state in the border regions with Macedonia“ (Macedonia, 1932). The data published about the number of the Bulgarians in Albania were relatively accurate.

The comments expressed by the Albanian emigrant community in Bulgaria were also favourable. In 1932, Albanian public figure Lazar Grabova,

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<sup>20</sup> A copy of the original was given to the author during his visit to Albania in 1992 and remains stored in his possession.

chairman of the Union of the Albanian Cultural Associations in Bulgaria, „Dashira,“ stated that „in Albania today there are several thousand Slavs, whom the Albanian people call Bulgarians“ (Macedonia, 1932).

However, at the same time, the signing of the Bulgarian-Albanian Final Protocol caused negative reactions in Serbia and in parts of Greece and became the reason to subject Tirana was subjected to massive diplomatic pressure, to prevent it from enforcing the provisions of the document. Right after delivering the protocol to the chairman of the council of the Second Balkan Conference, the Serbian delegation protested with a letter to the presidium by challenging „whether Albanians and Bulgarians even have the right to make such decisions“ (Mihaylov, 1973). The pressure Yugoslavia applied on Albania turned out to be decisive for the future fate of the Albanian-Bulgarian agreements from 1932 on. Belgrade organized a massive campaign, in which their allies were also included. Under Serbian suggestion, the French newspaper „Journal des Debats“ called the Albanian-Bulgarian Protocol „an intrigue that will be the cause of the break-up of the entity created for the benefit of the Balkan League“ (Journal de Debats, 1932). The Belgrade newspaper „Vreme“ called the talks between Albanians and Bulgarians „backstage and fishy“, and according to the Greek newspaper „Messager d'Athènes,“ the protocol was „vileness, stitched with white threads“ (Mihaylov, 1973).

The situation was correctly analysed by Dr. B. Petkov, who wrote in the bulletin „Father Paisiy“: „Undoubtedly, this formal recognition (of the Bulgarian minority in Albania, Ed.) brings us an important legal argument in support of our proposition for our ethno-demographic rights in Macedonia and its population. This will strongly irritate our western neighbours. They will probably want to exert over Albania, too, that same pressure that they exerted over Greece seven years ago by forcing them to refuse the ratification of the Kalfov – Politis Protocol“ (Petkov, 1932).

In his statement of June 15th, 1932, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations, the secretary of the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana Hristo Minkov wrote: „The Albanian Bulgarians will be the living connection between Albania and Bulgaria, who by the logic of history, common interests and fate, will have to walk together and in unison regarding all Balkan matters. The Albanian Bulgarians are also the living connection to the Bulgarians in Southwestern Macedonia. The moral connections between the Albanian Bulgarians and those on the other side of the border

in Southwestern Macedonia are so strong and firm, that everything that happens in Albania is brought immediately to Macedonia. This would explain the big and nervous reaction by the Serbian and the Greek press when the Albanian-Bulgarian Protocol for the mutual recognition of minorities was signed. Because the Serbs and the Greeks felt and grasped the idea that one day, naturally and logically, the big question will be asked – How is it possible for Bulgarians to live in Albania, beyond the border, but there are none in Ohrid, Debar, and Lerin?“

Yugoslavia was acting against the Albanian-Bulgarian Agreement and that became explicitly clear in 1934, when the Balkan Entente was created. Bulgaria and Albania found themselves excluded and isolated, which, in practice, condemned the efforts for granting rights to the formally recognized minority of Bulgarians in Albania to failure.

However, diplomatically restricting the mechanisms for Bulgarian influence in the defence of the rights of the Bulgarians in Albania was compensated to some extent by the support given by the Macedonian emigrants in Bulgaria and all over the world. For example, the refusal of Albania to enforce the Albanian-Bulgarian Protocol became the reason for the following text to be included in the approved resolution of the Eleventh Congress of the Macedonian Emigrants in Bulgaria, held in March, 1933: „The Congress takes serious notice of all who want to enforce a solution that cannot be accepted by the enslaved Bulgarians, and that they all carry the heavy historical burden, because such a solution will threaten national unity, for which all the sacrifices must be made. Just when this unity was about to strengthen, the Congress wanted, various factors to do anything they could, so that our fellow countrymen in Albania officially receive their cultural-national recognition and the social right to have their own schools and churches with their own language used in them and their own teachers and priests serving in them, just as Albanians, working abroad and in exile from the past, rightfully enjoy all their cultural and national rights in Bulgaria“ (Macedonian Tribune, 1933).

Macedonian emigrants in USA and Canada responded to the the call for aiding the Bulgarians in Albania. In his memoirs, M. Ognyanov writes that the Tirana resident Nikola Pandovski from Vrabnik „regularly received the newspaper „Macedonian Tribune“<sup>21</sup> from Toronto „. He shared

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<sup>21</sup> The newspaper „Macedonian Tribune“ is the organ of the Macedonian Patriotic Organization in the USA and Canada and the Macedonian-Bulgarian churches there. It has been published since 1927 in English and in Bulgarian using the pre-1945 orthography.



the newspaper with the more active Bulgarians in Albania and this had a lasting impact. „We celebrated Ilinden similarly to what we were reading in the “Macedonian Tribune” about the emigrants in USA and Canada. I had a „picnic“ in the city surroundings – somewhere at the foot of the Mount Dajti, next to the river Erzen“ (Ognyanov, 2002). In his book „Mala Prespa,“ Gure Duma writes that „books and bulletins were arriving from America such as the drama „Macedonian Blood Wedding“ by Voydan Chernodrin-ski. He said the newspaper “Macedonian Tribune” also arrived regularly. These publications were read much more in the mountain pastures, those lands, as the language (the Bulgarian, Ed.) was better understood „. Despite the fact that G. Duma defended Macedonist positions, he admitted that „what is most important to be reminded of is the fact that from 1925 to 1943 in Mala Prespa the Macedonian children studied the Bulgarian alphabet and language, because the population understood this language better“ (Duma, 2007).

Information about the close relationship between the Macedonian emigrants in USA and Canada and the Bulgarians in Albania is evident in the telegram sent from Athens and addressed to the Greek newspaper „Ethniki Kiri” published in New York . In the January 19th, 1931 issue, it was announced that „the Greek government follows the energetic activities of the Bulgarian organization in America, that has its own agents in Albania very closely“. (Mihaylov, 1973). These connections were made easier by the fact that some of the Macedonian emigrants in USA and Canada were Bulgarians from Albania who promoted active patriotic activities. For example, over 370 companies and families of „Macedonian-Bulgarian emigrants took part in the publication of the voluminous „Macedonian Almanac“, in the USA in 1940. Eight of them were Bulgarians from Albania: 4 from the village of Vrabnik, 3 from Mala Prespa and 1 from Gollobordë. Some of them, like the voivode Nako Grozdanov and the revolutionary Stavro Grozdanov from the village of Vrabnik, were active participants in the Ilinden Uprising that took place in 1903. Dimitar Sotirov was the son-in-law of the leader of the revolutionary committee in Vrabnik, Sotir Pandovski (Macedonian Almanac, 1940).

The measures Yugoslavia undertook to prevent the recognition of Bulgarians minority in Albania and the granting of cultural and educational rights, were aimed at hindering the recognition of the Bulgarians in the geographical region Macedonia controlled by Belgrade. In order to achieve

their goals, Yugoslavia took advantage of some of the unresolved socio-economic problems of the Albanian Bulgarians. The most characteristic agricultural trait in the Albania of this period was the *chiflik* system. This was especially characteristic in the region of Mala Prespa. When the Ottoman Empire still controlled the region, the residents of the village Gorna Gorica started a legal battle against Malik Bey Frasheri, who claimed that he the village owned his *chiflik*. Despite the fact that the Bitola Vilayet Court ruled that the residents of Gorna Gorica own the village land, the forests and the pastures, at the end of 1924, when Mala Prespa was included within the borders of Albania, Malik Bey Frasheri renewed his claims on the land on which Gorna Gorica was built. In 1928, Malik Bey Frasheri seized the village forests and the pastures. On August 30th, 1932, the villagers were notified that according to a court ruling, the owner of the village, including all its houses, yards and fields is Malik Bey and that they were obliged to leave their homes in three days, and the harvested crops and the household belongings were to be confiscated by the state to cover the legal expenses (Eldarov, 2000).

For this reason on September 2nd, 1932, the mayor and the elders of Gorna Gorica addressed the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana in writing, requesting help in defending them against the verdict. In the plea they wrote: „We, as Bulgarians, have no one else to turn to except for the Bulgarian Royal Legation in Tirana to defend us in this case, in order to remain in our birthplace, the way we were free there up to now; otherwise, we will be exiled to the Kingdom of Bulgaria, because we cannot watch our properties which have been forcefully taken, nor can we work for the beys as we once did „. This request is exceptionally important as it is sealed with the village seal which carries the signatures of the mayor Jovan Tole and Lambo Yanev and it is an official document of the local authorities. In it, it is explicitly emphasized that „our village Gorica... has 62 houses with 560 people, all of them Bulgarians“ (Appendices, facsimile 8).

The Bulgarian Legation in Tirana and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations in Sofia exerted a great effort to resolve the case, but the only thing they accomplished was a proposal by the Albanian government for the residents of Gorica to be given state land in the plain region Musachia, near the lower course of the Shkumbin and Semeni Rivers, where swamps were being drained in order to add new lands for cultivation. The Bulgarian villagers however refused to go there, because they

feared that they would be divided up amongst the other people who worked there . They also feared they could contract malaria.

In order to migrate to Bulgaria, however, the residents of Gorna Gorica had to cross through Yugoslav territory. As M. Ognyanov noted in his memoirs, during this period, „Bulgaria was unreachable“ (Ognyanov, 2002). After contacting the Yugoslav authorities, Belgrade sent an offer to the villagers of Gorna Gorica to settle in Yugoslavia. Especially active propaganda in this direction was developed by the Yugoslav Consulate in the Korçë region, with the promise that the villagers of Gorna Gorica would be settled in the region of Prespa or the region of Skopje in the houses of the Macedonian Albanians who had fled. The motives for these actions of Yugoslavia were described in a statement to the police department in Sofia in which it was said: „It must be known that granting rights to the Bulgarian minority in Albania is not pleasant for the Serbs, because if several thousand Bulgarians living in Albania are recognized as such, this would be a great propaganda victory for the Bulgarian national spirit in Macedonia. Serbia tries by all means possible to prevent this and makes the effort for several thousand Bulgarians to be exiled to Serbia to secure the benefits of the propaganda for themselves“.

The head of the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana, Mincho Minchev, met with the Albanian King Zog I and appealed „to his cordial feelings for the Bulgarians in Albania... to save those 150 unfortunate families from the misery and the tyranny that awaits them in Yugoslavia“. These diplomatic steps, however, did not bear the expected result and because of this, on April, 19th 1933, M. Minchev notified the Albanian authorities that „the Bulgarian Government views the expulsion of the villagers from Gorica as an *acte peu amical*<sup>22</sup> by Albania and I pointed out that this would make a bad impression everywhere, and in Bulgaria, it would provoke public opinion, all the more since the Albanians in Bulgaria have enjoyed and will continue to enjoy the of greatest hospitality“.

At the end of April, 1933, the Yugoslav consulate in the Korçë region issued visas for 600 villagers from Gorica, which amounted to 23.5% of the population of Mala Prespa at that moment, to cross the Albanian-Yugoslav border. However, instead of settling in in Resen region in Vardar Macedonia, the larger part of the migrants was redirected to Dyakovo in Kosovo

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<sup>22</sup> *acte peu amical* (French) – an inimical, but not illegal act in the context of international law.

among purely Albanian villages. On April 23rd, 1933, the Belgrade newspaper „Vreme“ announced that „two entire villages from Albania, whose residents were considered as part of the Bulgarian minority, crossed into Yugoslavia, stating that they are Yugoslavs“ (Vreme, 1933) (Appendices, facsimile 9). During this period, the demonym „Yugoslav“ had a strictly political, and not an ethnic meaning, which categorically shows that the villagers from Gorica, despite migrating there, did not identify as Serbs.

After the expulsion of the residents of Gorna Gorica, Malik Bey unsuccessfully tried to find people to settle in the empty village. In a confidential report of the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana from June 12th, 1933, it is stated that „Dr. Basho and his father-in-law Malik will not gain anything by the seizure of the *chiflik*, because they cannot find villagers, who would settle in Gorica“ (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 176K, i. 5, a.u. 663, p. 153). Three years later, Malik Bey once again tried to settle several Albanian families from the villages of Zvezda, Poleni, and Shenger. They, however, also did not pay anything to the bey and they were expelled. This is one of the few cases from the interwar period when attempts were made to settle Albanians in the mountain regions where the population was entirely Bulgarian. After he banished the Albanians, Malik bey was forced to invite villagers from the neighbouring Bulgarian villages in Mala Prespa to settle in the emptied village of Gorna Gorica. This was the second time he tried to resettle people in the village. The current residents of Gorna Gorica are primarily descended from the village of Shulin (Duma, 2007).

The Bulgarian Legation in Tirana continued to be interested in the fate of the Bulgarians from Gorna Gorica who migrated to Yugoslavia, using Albanian sources, as well, for information. In a report from July 17th, 1933, from Tirana, it is stated that „according to the correspondence between the Albanian Consuls in Bitola and Skopje, 18 houses that belonged to Albanians exiled from Dyakovo region were given to the villagers of Gorna Gorica, and the rest were given thirty newly built houses – one-story houses with unplastered walls and with only two or three rooms... They were given 25 acres of land each, maybe more, and seeds. He (Ekrem bey Vlora, director of the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tirana, Ed.) thinks that this Serbian kindness is temporary and in the near future, it will disappear and the migrants will be troubled by the local Albanian population“.

The expulsion of the Bulgarians from Gorna Gorica provoked discontent in various Bulgarian circles. For this reason, a series of harsh articles were published in the Bulgarian press, which forced the Albanian government to issue an official statement in April, 1933. The Albanian Press Bureau, through the Albanian Telegraph Agency and the newspapers „Besa“ and „Vatra“ released a communique on April 20th entitled „A Friendly Explanation to the Bulgarian Press“, where Albanian state declined the responsibility for what had happened. In this official Albanian position, it is explicitly stated that „the villagers in Gorica are Macedonian Bulgarians“, which is of great importance regarding the official recognition of the presence of Bulgarians in Albania and their actual status (Besa, Vatra, 1933). The issue of the Albanian newspaper „Besa“ from May 1st, 1933 is even more explicit. An article entitled „Feelings and Thoughts, The Question about the Villagers of Gorica and the Bulgarian Press“ expressed „sympathy to the Bulgarian people“ and the official Albanian position was restated: This was not „a government measure taken against a minority, which in this case is the Bulgarian minority“ (Besa, 1933). Later on, in that same article, it is stated that „regarding the Bulgarians, it does not seem necessary to us to pay attention to the rights of the minorities. Without resorting to needless flattery, we have the deepest sympathies towards the Bulgarian people. These sympathies did not arise yesterday, they have existed from the time before our national independence. The Albanian people will never forget that before the Albanian state existed, Bulgaria was a second motherland to us and an inseparable home, where our independence was planned. Even today, there is a large Albanian colony comprised of unquestionable patriots. We say this to prove that we have only sincere sympathies towards the Bulgarians”.

The Albanian government position and the publications in the Albanian press are actually a cover to conceal the complicated political situation in the country, including the status of the Bulgarian minority. In the analysis of the events around the expulsion of the villagers from Gorna Gorica conducted in Bulgaria, two different points of view collided. On one hand, in the Police Department in Sofia defended the point of view that „the Serbian influence over the current king Zogu was immense. When Zogu was forced to flee Albania, he went to Belgrade where during his entire stay he was the guest of King Alexander, and later with Serbian support /money, weapons, people, etc./ he forced his way into Albania and seized power... Albania

continues to have good relations with the Serbs“. On the other hand, in a very confidential report of the head of the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana M. Minchev to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations about the attitude of the Albanian government and the role of the Serbian propaganda regarding Gorna Gorica, it was stated that „the counteraction to the Albanians establishing and strengthening the Bulgarian communes is not caused by Serbophile intents, but out of fear not to annoy the Serbs, because such a strengthening of the Bulgarian minority in Albania would provoke repression on the Albanian minority in Yugoslavia“.

This is the primary motive that directed the behaviour Albanian domestic and foreign policy towards the Albanian Bulgarians during the period before the outbreak of the Second World War. This approach was additionally complicated by the perspective of eventual alterations of the Albanian state border in the future through the annexation of territories populated by Albanians in Yugoslavia and Greece. This tendency was stated even before August, 1928, when the head of the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana A. Grezhov wrote to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations, that after probing the opinions of and the discussion with notable Albanian citizens, he came to the conclusion that „these villages (with a Bulgarian population, Ed.) are subject to future combinations by the Albanian government against an eventual expansion of the Albanian border to the east and south“. However Bulgarian diplomacy was not prepared for such geopolitical shifts in the Balkans.

During the period between the two world wars, Bulgarian diplomacy often suffered from a lack of continuity whenever governments changed and whenever the diplomatic personnel was replaced. Besides this, Bulgarian diplomacy wobbled between its wish to help the Bulgarians in Albania and the external pressure exerted on it. Especially alarming were the processes that took place after the coup d'état on May 19th, 1934, in the organization of which there was Yugoslav participation. For example, in an undated document in the archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations, immediately after the inquiry sent on April, 6th 1935 to the General Directorate of Renovation, it is stated that „the Bulgarian population in Albania is not an element of great value for Bulgaria, neither in quantity nor in quality, but differentiating this population as a separate ethnic minority will be of great value in a political sense, because its existence in the eastern regions of Albania indirectly will confirm the



Bulgarian character of the population in Greek and Serbian Macedonia and from this point of view, the Bulgarian Government is obliged to act upon granting school and church privileges to the Bulgarians in Albania“ (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 176, i. 5, p. 178). Exactly this kind of approach is found in a report from September 12th, 1935, by M. Minchev, the head of the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations, in which he stated that the Albanian delegation to the League of Nations has submitted a decree that once again gave an opportunity to open minority schools in the country. To this report, however, a resolution in the ministry was given: „Besides budgetary reasons, the Ministry restrains itself from opening (Bulgarian, Ed.) schools in Albania for now out of purely political consideration – especially with a view to our relations with Yugoslavia“.

Regardless of the fact that the political circle „Zveno“ was gradually isolated in 1935, the factors examined up to this point continued to affect the Bulgarian policies, albeit with different magnitude, including those concerning the Bulgarians in Albania, due to which the assertion of their rights was not brought to an end.

When analysing the socio-political situation of the Bulgarian minority in Albania, special attention should be paid to the approach of different domestic and foreign factors towards the local Bulgarian Muslims. After the restoration of diplomatic relations between Sofia and Tirana, Bulgaria adopted an approach to defend „the church-school affairs“ of the Bulgarians in Albania. On one hand, they were justified on the basis of restoring rights that were present in the past and taken away after the Balkan Wars. At the same time, however, such a goal put an accent on the Bulgarian Orthodox Christians, because only they enjoyed these rights through the religious, cultural and educational functions of the Bulgarian Exarchate that took care of them. Because of this, the Bulgarian Muslims stood aside from the main spotlight, as they were not even recorded in some Bulgarian statistics, especially in the first half of the 1920s.

In reality, this led to an intensification of the process of national revival among the Bulgarian Muslims in Albania, as it was copied from the Albanian model to a great extent. In its brief form, it was clearly specified by the Albanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ilias Vrioni, in his interview with the Bulgarian journalist D. Katsev-Burski: „In its policy, the Albanian government has not specified an official religion. In this way, we consider

the three religions practised in Albania – Islam, the Catholicism and the Orthodoxy – to be equally official „.

The role of religious unity in the Albanian national doctrine is examined in a confidential report by Srebren Poppetrov to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations from May 1st, 1929. The fact that the Albanian government and the Albanian intellectuals were building a national slogan that stands above all the others in the name of national and state unity was noted. „We are Albanians, brothers in blood, nationality, language and morals – the three religions are adopted from outside and afar“. This is the way the Albanian state became homogeneous regarding nationality, with a huge Albanian majority from all three faiths. In his report, S. Poppetrov gave specific examples: „Enthused by such a concept, all Albanian intellectuals and patriots, regardless of their faith, very festively celebrated the proclamation of the independent Orthodox Church in Albania. What made the Catholic and the Muslim Albanians rejoice was the fact that their Orthodox „brothers“ renounced the Greek Patriarchate?! Their highest state interest: the Orthodox do not wish to be called or considered Greeks by someone because they were Orthodox Patriarchists and had studied in Greek until recently. They wished to be considered Albanians. This makes the Albanian national organism. They do not wish Turkey to think there is a Turkish population here and they want to be assured once and for all that in Albania, there are Muslims who belong to the Albanian nation and that the origin of their faith came not from Albania, but from afar“.

Coming across this officially accepted Albanian model, the local Bulgarian Muslims started to get a more clear perspective of the differences between religious and ethnic belonging. The Bulgarian language they speak and their contacts with the Bulgarian Legation, with the IMRO, and the emigrant organizations in Bulgaria preserved and rekindled their Bulgarian self-consciousness. For example, in a confidential report from December 20th, 1930, by S. Poppetrov to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations, it is stated that „among the local Bulgarian Muslims, there are people who have resided in Bulgaria, and some have even served in the Bulgarian Army. They read Bulgarian newspapers with great relish and delight. I deliver some to them from time to time. Some of these people – and others – accept Bulgarian primers for their children. Some were happy when I told them that the „Quran“ is already translated into Bulgarian and they would accept it in order to the illiterate believers“.

In the same document, it is pointed out that there are around 25,000 Bulgarian Muslims in Albania, who are not different than the best Orthodox Bulgarians in anything, except for the Muslim religion that they profess, but do not know. Regarding this, S. Poppetrov proposed that around ten copies of the aforementioned translation of the Quran to be bought by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations and distributed among the Bulgarian Muslims in Albania, as it would play a twofold role:

- a) It would enlighten the basic aspects of their own religion.
- b) It would excite the love for the written Bulgarian word and it would show them that they can profess whatever religion they want, but „even in this religion, and in the expedient education as a whole, the mother tongue is what causes a great reaction in men and in a given society“.

In his proposal, S. Poppetrov went even further. According to him, the Bulgarian translation of the Quran should be distributed even among the more active Bulgarian Muslims in the region of Reka in Yugoslavia, because they are precisely the people who flee to Albania, as the Orthodox Bulgarians flee from Macedonia.

In other reports, S. Poppetrov wrote that „by their patriarchal way of life, by their morals and customs, by their speech and songs, by devotion to their homeland and birthplace, by love for agriculture and their diligence, by their hospitality and curiosity – by everything that characterizes the average Bulgarian – these Muslim Bulgarians are more Bulgarian, not only than their neighbours in the area, but also any Orthodox Bulgarian wherever he is found“. In his report from July, 1931, he stated that „the Bulgarian Muslims are much better preserved nationally and language-wise than the Orthodox... There are cases in which Bulgarian Muslims, even more than the Orthodox... would oppose these unjust persecutions against the Bulgarian spoken language and the Bulgarian written word“.

The Bulgarian self-consciousness of the Albanian Bulgarian Muslims, besides their linguistic and close familial relations with Bulgarian Christians, is also charged by the perception the Albanians have of them. For example, in a confidential letter from January 14th, 1931, of the Politics Directorate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations to the provisional head of the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana, Hristo Minkov, a publication in the Albanian newspaper „Ora“ from August 29th, 1930, is noted, in which an Albanian correspondent, under the alias „one

student,“ expressed his impressions of his travels through the area „Gollobordë“, populated by Bulgarian Muslims. The author was impressed by the fact that all the villagers there, the teachers and the students spoke only Bulgarian, and he voiced his indignation, that in almost an entire district in Albania, this language was allowed to be spoken. In the same letter, instructions to the Bulgarian Legation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations were given to respond to this publication in the Albanian newspaper about the Bulgarian Muslims in Gollobordë.

When clarifying the social status of the Albanian Bulgarians, the information presented in 1932 by the secretary of the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana, Hristo Minkov, has to be taken into account: „The more intelligent and brighter Bulgarians have emigrated with their entire families, and what is left are the poorer and simpler people. There is not a single robust and spirited guild, there are no intellectuals at all to support and lead and who could eventually occupy seats and posts in the Albanian state administration and to take on an appropriate role in the state. In this matter, the Greeks and the Aromani have more leverage and far exceed the Bulgarians in Albania. They have many intellectuals who have skilfully adapted and occupy many government positions (cabinet ministers, parliament members, doctors, teachers, and priests). They have also a strongly established urban middle-class, with many merchants, doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, etc. They have their villages, whose cultural and religious interests are completely satisfied as the education and liturgy in churches is in their own respective languages“.

The situation, as conditioned by the objective difficulties such as the lack of the necessary number of Bulgarian intellectuals, guilds, and entrepreneurs was additionally aggravated by inconsistent Bulgarian state policy. As Hristo Minkov noted in his report from 1932: „For one reason or another, the Bulgarian Government has shown very little interest in the Albanian Bulgarians until now and many mistakes and many blunders at favourable moments in time were made regarding this. There has been a lack of a clear grasp about the situation of these Bulgarians, there has been the lack of a single leading idea regarding the satisfaction of their cultural needs, as well as any systematic and methodical work in this direction“. For this reason, in the following period before World War II, the primary goal which was established, was the following: „The Albanian Bulgarians must remain Bulgarians, to be loyal and honest Albanian citizens, fighters and

supporters of the Albanian independent state. First and foremost, the Bulgarian Government should be quite clear... that it is strongly interested in the fate of the Bulgarians in Albania and in the recognition of their cultural rights. The steps that must be taken, especially by those in Tirana, should be systematic and undertaken with the needed energy, virtue and tactfulness. These steps must be taken in a friendly spirit, because the Albanians are very distrustful... The questions must be presented clearly and openly, without arousing any suspicion and always in the name of the well-grasped interest of both countries with a view to the future and a sustainable peace in the Balkans“.

### **2.3. Statistics on the Bulgarian population in Albania in the second half of the 1920s and 1930s.**

The lack of credible information about the number of the Bulgarians in Albania during this period is an essential problem for Bulgarian diplomats. On June 25th, 1925, the head of the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana, I. Ikonov, stated in a report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations, that „one of the tasks of the Legation that was entrusted to me was to verify the old statistics and to determine exactly which and how many villages there are among those that are considered on the territory of present day Albania that actually are within the borders of this land, and also to gather data about the number of houses and their inhabitants. Without this information, it would be impossible to make a clear assessment of the number and strength of the Bulgarian element in Albania“. In the same document, a list of the Bulgarian villages in Albania was presented after the above mentioned verification was completed“.

For the Kostur region, it is reported that „of the Bulgarian villages that were in Kostur region administratively and spiritually before the Balkan Wars, today, only the town Bilishta with around 40 Bulgarian houses and the village of Vrabnik... with around 70 houses belong to Albania; all the other villages remain in Greece“.

For the Prespa region, 12 Bulgarian villages are reported as being located in Albania. Actually three of them, regardless of their Bulgarian names, are not inhabited by Bulgarians: Rakica, Shiyak, and Zagradec are inhabited by Albanians. The villages of Leska and Tuminec were recorded with their Albanian names Lajthizë and Bezmisht.

For the Korçë region and Poletto, the information given by I. Ikonomov significantly differs from the actual situation: There were reported 2 and 5 villages respectively, and in Poletto, the village Oboki was missing. For Gollubordë, only 6 villages were reported as Bulgarian.

Besides having underestimated the number of settlements with a Bulgarian population in Poletto and especially in Gollubordë, it is also notable that the number of the Bulgarians in them is heavily underestimated. For example, for the villages Urbele, Deolyani and Makelari, the head of the legation I. Ikonomov wrote that they have 2, 4, and 4 houses respectively. For Golemo Ostreni, only one house was reported. For the region of Gora, no information information at all was given.

Stating the stipulation that „information gathering is difficult“, the fact is that up until the end of his term in 1928, I. Ikonomov did not visit even one of the Bulgarian villages in Albania personally. Due to this, with his information that „the total number of the (Bulgarian, Ed.) population does not seem to surpass 5 – 6 000 people in total“, he misled the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations in Sofia. As has already been clarified, the number of the Bulgarians in 1912, in the settlements that became parts of Albania after 1913, is 17,155 people. According to the Austro-Hungarian and French censuses from 1918, in Kukës Gora, Poletto, and the Korçë regions alone, the Bulgarians numbered 4,178 people, and according to the Greek census from 1920, in Mala Prespa, there were 2,356 Bulgarians in this region, which amounts to 6,534 people in total from the three foreign censuses and this does not even count the Bulgarian population in Gollubordë.

In order to support the cultural and educational affairs of the Bulgarians in Albania and gather more detailed information about their numbers, on August 17th, 1928, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations created the position of „Chief Inspector-Organizer of Church-School Affairs of the Bulgarians in Albania“. Srebren Poppetrov from the village Varbeni (Ekshi Su) in the region of Lerin was appointed to this position. After arriving in Albania, Sr. Poppetrov went on a tour around the entire country, aiming to research the local Bulgarian population (Eldarov, 2000). During his term, from the beginning of October, 1928, to the middle of 1931, he wrote 100 reports, in which he „presents the most precise statistical data, the only one of its kind for this region“ (Todorovski, 1998).



When analysing the statistical information gathered by Sr. Poppetrov, one must keep in mind that he got to know Albania bit by bit. Exactly because of this reason, the data in his reports should be examined gradually. As Sv. Eldarov correctly notes, „with every consequent report of the chief inspector, the number of the Bulgarians in Albania kept on increasing. His first assessments shows about 8,000 Bulgarians. Later on, that number doubled, and after that, it increased to 25,000, it then surpassed 30,000 and at the end, it reached 40 000, of whom 15,000 were Bulgarian Christians and 25,000 Bulgarian Muslims“. Actually, in a report from July 10th, 1929, the Bulgarians in Kukës Gora are mentioned for the first time and their number was estimated to be around 8,500 people. In order to avoid the unnecessary duplication of data from different documents or the usage of incorrect information, that was later corrected by Sr. Poppetrov himself, where he used data by region from his summary reports from August, 14th and 16th, 1930, and his report to the Prime Minister and head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations of Bulgaria dated from July, 1931.

At the moment of writing of these documents, all the regions in Albania populated by Bulgarians were visited personally, and „the only region remaining unvisited is Gora“. Only in this region is there ambiguity regarding the ethnic belonging of the residents of the different villages. For example, Sr. Poppetrov describes the village Novo Selo (Novosej in Albanian) as Bulgarian, but according to the present day perception of the Goran Bulgarians, the residents of Novo Selo are Albanians, and they even declared themselves as such at the time of the alteration of the Serbian-Albanian border in 1925. According to a folklore story, originating in the village Shishtavec, when the „international committee“ for determining the border was in the neighbouring Novo Selo, the residents were Albanians and they were perceived as such by the local Bulgarians (Toncheva, 2013). In his report, Sr. Poppetrov also mentions the village Orchishta as situated in the Albanian territory of the region Gora, but a village with this name does not exist. This probably refers to the village Orchusha, situated close to the border, but in Prizren Gora on Serbian territory. At the same time, the village Kosharishte was not mentioned. Similar mistakes can be noted regarding the region of Gollobordë. Because of this, when calculating the number of Bulgarians in Albania, the residents of these villages, for which an obvious error was made, are not taken into account. For calculating the

number of Bulgarians in Poletto, the statistical data presented by Dimitar Iliev<sup>23</sup> from 1929 was used.

Srebren Poppetrov thought that in 1930, the total number of the Bulgarians in Albania was 38,155 of whom 26,275 people or 68.86% were Muslims and 11,875 people or 31.14% were Christians. However, after correcting the obvious errors in the number of settlements, it was established that the total number of Bulgarians in Albania was 27,067 people (Appendices, table 9). Of them, 23,680 people or 91.33% lived entirely in their traditional lands.

In 1930, the number of the Bulgarians in Kukës Gora was 8,630 people, all of them Muslims. About the homogeneous Bulgarian character of the population, Sr. Poppetrov wrote that „this and the other area of Gora (both the Albanian and the Serbian parts, Ed.) are both populated entirely by Bulgarians that were converted to Islam when the Turks ruled the lands... The ten (actually nine as it was pointed out that Orchusha is in Prizren Gora, Ed.)... villages are purely Bulgarian in language, character, morals and everything else“. In another report of his from July, 1931 Sr. Poppetrov informed the Bulgarian Prime Minister and the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations that „in the region of Gora... in Albania there are 10 remote villages that are inhabited purely by Bulgarian Muslims without having Albanians among them. They contain around 1,000 houses“.

Compared to 1918, the increase in the number of Bulgarians in Kukës Gora was 373%, but compared to 1912, it was 144%. Except for this natural growth, during the period after the war, the return of emigrants, who had fled the region, and the arrival of new people from Prizren Gora was observed. The average household size in the area in 1930 was 6 people.

Significant changes occurred among the population of Poletto. The data from Sr. Poppetrov shows a rapid decrease in the number of Bulgarians and their replacement by Albanians. Similar data was given also by Dimitar Iliev in 1929 (Eldarov, 2000). In 1930, the number of residents in the villages that were inhabited only by Bulgarians in 1873 was 1,766 people. However, of those people 1,579 were Albanians and only 187 were

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<sup>23</sup> Dimitar Iliev was born in the village of Vorbnica, Gollubordë. In 1927 he was appointed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations as an inspector-organizer of the church-school affairs in Albania as an official with the Bulgarian legation in Tirana.

Bulgarians. In his report, D. Iliev wrote that in Poletto „there are villages that are completely abandoned. Besides the wars, one of the main reasons for this is the lack of churches and schools, and because of this, they have moved out... The men, the villagers, went abroad – to work in Central Albania, in Greece, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia“. At the same time, Albanians began to settle in the depopulated Bulgarian villages in the area.

In 1930, the Bulgarian population in Gollobordë was 11,262 people. Compared to 1897, the increase was 84.6%. The average household size in the area in 1930 was 6 people. According to D. Iliev the local Bulgarians „did not go abroad before nor do they go now „. Sr. Poppetrov informs that during this period 6% of the Bulgarians in the area were Christians, and the rest were Muslims. In his report from 1931, Sr. Poppetrov stated that „the Muslim Bulgarians in Gollobordë inhabit large villages without Albanians and they amount to 1,900 houses“.

During the same period, the total Bulgarian population in Mala Prespa numbered 2,550 people. Compared to 1920, it decreased by 172 people, which amounts to -6.3%. The reasons for such an outcome should be looked for in the deteriorated gender structure of the population during the period after 1913, due to a smaller number of women than men, and in people going abroad for work. Both processes were constant.

The average household size of the Bulgarians in this area was 9.2 people. When gathering statistical data for Mala Prespa, Sr. Poppetrov also recorded the number of children of student age. There were exactly 370 people between the ages of 7 to 12 years, which amounts to 14.5%.

In 1930, the population of the villages Boboshtica and Drenovo was 1,600 and 1,080 people respectively. Compared to 1918, the population increase was 35.9% and 80.4% respectively. The average household consisted of 6.2 and 6 people respectively.

A significant increase in the population is observed also in the Bulgarian village of Vrabnik. Its residents numbered 600, which compared to 1920 is a 63.9% increase. The average household size was 5 people.

By 1930, 2,247 people or 8.67% of the local Bulgarian population, had migrated to the inner parts of Albania. Although the data is incomplete, it shows that those who had moved had smaller households. The size of the households of those who settled in the administrative centers of Bilishta and Korçë that are geographically relatively close to the regions with a high density of Bulgarian population, was 4.3 people, while in the more remote areas like Tirana the value for this indicator is only 2.5.

It is notable that in the villages where the land was owned by the villagers themselves, the household size continued to be smaller, while in Mala Prespa, where some of the villages were still *chifliks*, it was bigger.

Clarifying the number of the Bulgarians in Albania in 1930 is an important task, because it allows the total number of the population of the country from the second census taken in that same year to be compared. At this time, the country had 833,618 people, and the Bulgarians represented 3.25% of the population. The average number of the households of the Bulgarians in Albania in this period was 6.25 people, while the average value of this indicator remained 5.7 for the entire country. It can be assumed that, in this period, the Bulgarians had a higher birth rate than the Albanians, and at the same time, the lack of proper conditions and means of livelihood in the mountain regions became the reason for the start of a migration on a larger scale towards the inner parts of Albania.

Regardless of the fact that in the middle of 1931 Sr. Poppetrov returned to Bulgaria, his stay in Albania left a lasting mark. The statistical information he gathered has been in use for a long time by various Bulgarian state institutions when planning their affairs regarding the Albanian Bulgarians. In 1932, he summarized in eight points the policy that Bulgaria should pursue regarding the Bulgarians in Albania. The first is the reinstitution of the schools that existed before 1913 and, also, the opening new Bulgarian schools. Another measure he recommended is to defend the right of the Bulgarians in Albania to unite freely in cultural, educational and charity associations, which should also include opening a Bulgarian bookshop and publishing a Bulgarian newspaper. As a particularly important measure, Sr. Poppetrov proposed „to include the official statistics of the Bulgarian minority and to give them the opportunity to declare themselves as Bulgarians to the authorities... When declaring as Bulgarians, the religious component should not be an obstacle, in the same way it is not for the Albanians“ (Poppetrov, 1932).

The statistics Sr. Poppetrov compiled about the number of the Bulgarians and their religious and territorial distribution was used by the Bulgarian Administration up until the start of the Second World War. For example, at the beginning of April, 1935, the department for „National education“ at the General Directorate of Renovation addressed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations in a confidential request to be provided with „a list of villages inhabited by Bulgarians in Albania“. On

April 6th, summarized data „gathered by the former inspector-organizer of the school affairs of the Bulgarian minorities in Albania Mr. Srebren Poppetrov” was sent. According to this information, the total number of Bulgarians in Albania was 30,885 people and „of these Bulgarians, around 10-12 thousand were Orthodox Christians and 19-20 thousand were Muslims“. (Appendices, facsimile 10) The interest of the General Directorate of Renovation towards the Bulgarians in Albania is of particularly important significance, because it is a high state institution, directly answering to the prime minister, and its primary function was to organize the spiritual life in Bulgaria for unity and renovation in service of the state and the nation.

The Bulgarian state interest shown coincided with the same interest shown by the Albanian authorities. In order to clarify the actual number of the Bulgarian minority on their territory, in 1935, the Secret Service at the Ministry of Interior in the prefectures Korçë and Debar was tasked with compiling a list of the villages in both regions, in which people who speak Bulgarian reside (the term „Bulgarophiles“ was used) (Appendices, table 10, facsimile 11). The results of this statistical inquiry do not include the other prefectures in Albania, and because of this, it does not contain information about the people who speak Bulgarian in Kukës Gora and those who had migrated to the inner parts of Albania. Despite this flaw and considering the confidential character of the data, it can be assumed that it is sufficiently objective. It is clear from the data that 11,261 people who speak Bulgarian lived in Poletto, Gollobordë, Mala Prespa, and the village of Vrabnik. They resided in 1,888 houses. The average size of the Bulgarian household was 5.96 people.

Of the three regions, the one with the largest Bulgarian population was Gollobordë, with 7,485 people, living in 1,359 houses with an average household size of 5.5 people. Of them, 560 people were Christians or 7.5%, and 6,925 people were Muslims or 92.5%. The average household size for the Bulgarian Christians was 4.5 people, and for the Bulgarian Muslims it was 5.6. Compared to 1930, the number of Bulgarians in Gollobordë decreased by 22.5%. In this period, a decrease in the birth rate was not observed and the total loss in the number of the Bulgarians in Gollobordë can only be explained by accelerated migration processes.

In Mala Prespa, the number of people that spoke Bulgarian was 2,834 people, living in 300 houses, which amounted to an average household size of 9.4 people. All of them were Christians. Compared to 1930, the total

number increased by 11.1%. It must be taken into account that the five year period that had passed coincided with the expulsion of the villagers of Gorna Gorica, which is indicative of the high birth rate among the Bulgarian population in this region at the time.

In this period which we have examined, the depopulation and de-Bulgarization of Poletto continued. In 1935, Bulgarians lived only in the villages Urbele and Gorno Karchishta, in which the total number of people was only 356, of whom 173 or 48.6% were Christians and 183 or 51.4% were Muslims. The average size of the households was 4.4 people, 4.1 for the Christians, and 4.7 for the Muslims. It is notable that according to the Albanian statistics, the Muslim residents of the two villages spoke Bulgarian, while the statistics of Sr. Poppetrov from 1930 indicate that they were Albanians. This exact discrepancy hinders the comparison of the results for Poletto. It can be assumed that the informants of Sr. Poppetrov only pointed out the Christians in the two villages as Bulgarians, and their numbers in 1935 decreased by 7.5% compared to 1930. For the same period, the number of the Muslim residents of the two villages decreased by 58.9%, which confirms the conclusion about the existence of a lasting trend of depopulation in the region of Poletto.

In the village of Vrabnik, 402 people lived in 83 houses and the average household size was 4.8 people. Compared to 1930, the total number of residents decreased by 33%.

The trend in the two mixed villages of Lin and Pogradec on the western shore of lake Ohrid is even more negative. In 1935, 162 and 22 Bulgarians, respectively, lived in them, the population decrease in comparison to 1930 is 76.9% for the first and 92.7% for the latter. It is notable that the average household size in Lin was 2.66 people, which is significantly lower compared to the other Bulgarian settlements. This is most probably due to the accelerated migration of the Bulgarian population.

In the inquiry from 1935 of the Secret Service at the Ministry of Interior in the prefectures Korçë and Debar, the residents of the villages Boboshtica and Drenovo were not reported as Bulgarian speaking. During this period, they were bilingual and the Bulgarian language was still in use.

Despite that, as a result of the Bulgarian-Albanian final Protocol, signed on January, 9th 1932, the Bulgarian minority in Albania was recognized as such and its existence was noted in several Albanian government documents and press publications. But because of the strong foreign pres-



sure, mostly from Yugoslavia, the granting of specific cultural, educational or political rights to the Bulgarians in Albania was not achieved. A document named „Short Exposition of the Situations of the Bulgarian Minority in Albania“ that was attached to the inquiry from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations from 1935 to the General Directorate of Renovation stated that „in the Albanian official statistics, however, the Bulgarians are not present as a separate ethnic element“ (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 175K, i. 5, a.u. 663, p. 176). Despite this fact, the existing statistical information from the period between the two world wars allows for a comparatively accurate analysis and conclusion about the demographic processes among the Bulgarians in Albania, and namely:

- The birth rate among the Albanian Bulgarians is close to and even a bit higher than the same rate among the Albanian population, due to which we cannot speak of an Albanian demographic pressure.
- Because of the high mountainous character of most of the Bulgarian settlements in Kukës Gora, Gollobordë, and Mala Prespa and the limited possibilities for livelihood, a migration process had started among the Bulgarian population which started moving to the larger Albanian cities, and an Albanian population did not settle in in their place. The only exception is the region of Poletë, where the terrain is flat and suitable for agriculture and farming, due to which it appeared attractive to Albanian settlers.
- The Albanian Bulgarians who migrated found themselves in a foreign language environment and this facilitated their Albanization.
- Albanization is also observed in the regions of Kukës Gora, Poletë, and Gollobordë, compactly populated by Bulgarians, due to contacts with regions with an Albanian population.

### *Chapter III*

## **THE BULGARIANS IN ALBANIA IN THE AGE OF TOTALITARIANISM**

### **3.1. Albanian Bulgarians during World War II**

The unresolved problems after World War I became one of the main reasons for the escalation leading to another world conflict. In 1915, when Italy joined the Entente, the Albanian territories around Vlora, plus the island of Sazani, were promised to Rome. After the end of World War I, Italy refused to withdraw its troops from the area, and because of this, the Albanian government sent an ultimatum to Italy on June 4th, 1920, to transfer the administration of the city and the region to the sovereign Albanian authorities. From June 4th to September 3rd, 1920, there was a short-lived armed conflict between Albania and Italy, in which the poorly armed but strongly motivated Albanian volunteer squads crushed the well-armed Italian forces and Italy signed an agreement to withdraw its troops and renounce its claims for the city of Vlora.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Italian public opinion and the nationalists had not forgotten „the Albanian disgrace“ in Vlora. At the same time, due to a lack of an alternative, Albania bound itself completely with Rome economically speaking, and, in 1939, 92.1% of Albanian exports were going to Italy. In the 1930s, once again, the fears that Albania might be occupied and divided between Serbia and Greece grew. As early as 1933, the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations about the „new policy course for bringing the country closer to Yugoslavia, which the Albanian government, namely the king, has been leading for several month now“.

Albania becoming close friends with Yugoslavia and Greece led to signing a trade agreement in 1934 that was viewed by Mussolini as a threat to the Mediterranean and global Italian geopolitical interests as a whole. For this reason, Italy strived to limit the opportunities for the influence of its competitors. At the beginning of March 1936, the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana informed the government that the talks between Albania and Italy had concluded and „the former would accept difficult conditions that

would impact her prestige and sovereignty“ (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 176K, i. 5, a.u. 663, p. 179).

In this geopolitical race for influence in Albania, a certain role was also played by the local Bulgarians. A confidential report by the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana from June 12th, 1933, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations, relayed information given by the Italian Minister Plenipotentiary according to whom „Mussolini spoke in front of him quite absurdly about the Albanian government and especially about the irresponsible factors in Albania, because they allowed Gorani people to emigrate to Yugoslavia... He expressed his astonishment that king Zog, who has provided so much evidence for political perspicacity and skills, managed to make such an unforgivable mistake on the matter of the Gorani and placed one more weapon in the hands of Serbia in their efforts for Albania“ (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 176K, i. 5, a.u. 663, p. 153).

This pursuit for influence in Albania was observed especially highly on the eve of the first stage of World War II, that broke out with the German invasion of Czechoslovakia on March, 15th 1939. Mussolini was not informed in advance about this attack and he felt offended, because he was neglected as an equal ally in the imposition of the „new order“ in Europe. Italy sought compensation and on March 25th, 1939, handed an ultimatum to the Albanian government demanding the deployment of Italian troops in Albania. On April 7th, 100,000 Italian troops invaded Albania and occupied it. On April 8th, King Zog I fled from Albania, and on April 12th, the Albanian Parliament was forced to vote in favour of his dethronement and declare a „personal union“ with the Kingdom of Italy, offering the Albanian crown to the Italian King Victor Emmanuel III. In Albania, the Italian authorities began imposing fascist ideology.

Immediately after the Italian occupation, the Italian Pio Bondioli was sent to Albania, where he wrote the book „Albania, the Fifth Coast of Italy“. In it, there is a special section, dedicated to the ethnic minorities, among which the Bulgarians are mentioned, as well. According to Bondioli „the Bulgarians are represented by remnants of the ancient invaders (the Bulgarians, Ed.) in the villages around the Korçë region“ (Bondioli, 1939). Later on the author states that the memory of the Bulgarians is preserved, especially among the fair-haired types of Albanians, living in the south. In his book, P. Bondioli wrote about Macedonians also, but at this point in time, he invested a regional meaning to the term, and not ethnic one.

For example, he writes that „the Bulgarian and the Bulgarian-Macedonian squads (bands of revolutionists) have been formed and participate under the command of their respective leaders (voivodes)“. The following events show that this approach is obviously used in order to introduce a future divide on the axis Bulgarians – Macedonian Bulgarians – Macedonians.

In these new altered conditions in August 1939, 19 Bulgarians, representatives of the villages inhabited by a Bulgarian population in Albania, petitioned the Bulgarian *Tsaritsa* [Queen] Giovanna with a request to speak to the Italian authorities on their behalf, so that the usage of the Bulgarian language would be allowed in their schools and churches.<sup>24</sup> The document that was sent stated: „We turn to you, ...in whose veins flows the noble blood of the King Emperor Victor Emmanuel III, your father and protector of those Bulgarians that remain under the roof of small Albania. It is you whom we ask to solicit on our behalf to your holy father to grant us the right to listen to the Gospel and the other holy books in our churches in the language of our ancestors, to grant us the right to teach to our children the language that our fathers taught us in the few schools we have in our villages. Let the bright light of the Bulgarian spirit live in the souls of those young beings, let the thought that they are Bulgarians solidify in their minds and that they will live to see the day when they will proudly carry the name Bulgarians without punishment“.

After the petition of the Bulgarians in Albania arrived in the royal chancellery in Sofia, it was forwarded to the prime minister and head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations Georgi Kyoseivanov. There, on September 16th, 1939, a resolution was adopted according to which „given the political situation for now nothing will be done, we will wait for a more favourable moment“. This way, once again, in such a decisive moment, another Bulgarian Government did not definitively take the side of the Albanian Bulgarians, which caused disadvantageous consequences for them.

From a statistically demographic point of view, what is important is the fact that in the request of the Albanian Bulgarians, it is pointed out

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<sup>24</sup> According to Nikola Pandovski, one of the authors of the petition and a representative from the village of Vrabnik, whom the author of this book met in 1992 in his home village, in the light of the developments at that time, the petition was organized quickly and the signatures were of people from the respective villages that resided mainly in Tirana. Because a representative from the village of Dolna Gorica was not found, it was not listed in the petition.

that its authors are the „undersigned representatives of the villages with a Bulgarian population in Albania – duly listed below, describing every village separately, with the number of families and their members“. The document contains valuable statistical information that, however, covers only the Bulgarian Christians, as it is only for them that the right to use the Bulgarian language in churches is requested (Appendices, table 11).

When comparing the statistical data from 1939 to those of the Secret Service at the Ministry of the Interior of Albania in the prefectures Korçë and Debar from 1935, it is established that the petition sent to Tsaritsa Giovanna reflected the demographic situation objectively. For example, the number of houses in Mala Prespa, excluding the village of Gorica, in 1939 was 242. In 1935, in the same region, the number of houses including the village of Gorica was 300, and without it 238 or in 4 years, the number of houses in the villages listed in Mala Prespa increased only by 4. In 1935, the number of houses of the Bulgarian Christians in Gollobordë was 125, and in 1939 it was 129. The trend of decrease in the number of Bulgarian Christians stayed the same in Poletto. In 1935, the number of Bulgarian Christian houses was 42, and in 1939 dropped to 39. The number of houses also decreased in the village of Vrabnik, which was populated by Bulgarians. In 1935, there were 83, and in 1939 there were 70. However, the biggest decrease in the number of the Bulgarian houses was in the village of Lin: from 61 in 1935 to 20 in 1939, which confirms the correctness of the conclusion made based on the statistical inquiry of the Secret Service at the Ministry of Interior of Albania from 1935 that, keeping in mind the small size of the households, Bulgarian population in the village of Lin had started an intensive process of moving out of the village.

If one examines the average household size of the Bulgarian Christians in every separate settlement according to the statistical inquiry of the Secret Service at the Ministry of Interior of Albania in the prefectures Korçë and Debar from 1935 and compares it to the number of houses inhabited by Bulgarian Christians in Albania in 1939, then their total count would be around 3,980 people.

On October 19th, 1939, the Debar Benevolent Brotherhood in Sofia addressed the chairman of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church by informing him that the „Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations was informed multiple times and was begged do take any action on the matter, so that the Bulgarians from these villages too can

enjoy church and school rights, like all the other nationalities – Greeks and Serbs. However, all our requests were in vain. Today the situation has changed, because of the Italian occupation of Albania. The authorities not only allow, but want the churches and the schools of the Bulgarians to pray to God and to study in the Bulgarian language. The lack of priests and teachers is the reason, even now, for not being able to satisfy the wishes of the population“. After the Holy Synod forwarded this report of the Debar Brotherhood to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations, on November 9th, 1939, an answer was received from the Directorate of the Religious Denominations, in which it was stated that „The Ministry will research the matter for appointing priests and teachers in Albania and will act in accordance with current political conditions“.

The dynamic of the situation in the Balkans, however, was more rapid than the speed with which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations researched the possibilities for improving the rights of the Bulgarian minority in Albania. One year after Italy occupied Albania and declared a „personal union,“ they decided to conquer Libya and Egypt. In order to lead successful military campaigns in North Africa and to improve its strategic situation in the Mediterranean Sea, Mussolini needed control over the territories of Greece. To this purpose, he took advantage of the existing Greek-Albanian disputes on the so called matter of Epirus. On October 28th, 1940, the Italian Army attacked Greece. At first, the Italians achieved success marching into the Greek territory, but later on, they were pushed out of Epirus and the military actions moved onto Albanian territory. At the time of the military actions, Italy drafted troops from all of Albania, including from the settlements inhabited by Bulgarians. Some of them were taken prisoners by the Greeks and were interned in the inner parts of Greece or on the islands.<sup>25</sup>

At the same time, in the middle of December, 1940, Hitler finally approved the directive for the impending attack against the USSR. It was planned for the preparations for the attack to be completed by May 15th, 1941. During the progress of this operation, Germany strived to secure its southern flank that was threatened by the prolonged Italian-Greek War

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<sup>25</sup> The prisoners of war of Bulgarian descent who had been drafted by the Italian Army and interned in the inner parts of Greece, were freed only after announcement of the official capitulation of Athens on April 23rd, 1941. When they were released, many of them declared their ethnic belonging as Bulgarian.



and the British troops that were on Greek territory. For this reason, Hitler decided to aid Mussolini, and German troops, that were deployed on the territory of Romania, had to go through Bulgaria and Yugoslavia (Dimittrov, 1983). The diplomatic pressure of the Nazi authorities on Belgrade and Sofia to join the Axis powers increased. On October 8th, 1940, German troops were stationed in Romania, and on December 12th, Hitler issued a directive with the code name „Marita“ with which he planned his military operation against Greece.

Bulgaria and Yugoslavia had reached an impasse. On March 1st, 1941, Hitler's Germany declared war on Greece and later that same day the Bulgarian prime minister signed a protocol for Bulgaria joining the Tripartite Pact. On March, 25th 1941 Yugoslavia joined the axis Rome – Berlin – Tokyo. During the period in question, due to the negotiations between Germany and Yugoslavia and later the latter joining the Tripartite Pact, Hitler not only encouraged Bulgaria to revise its stance on the matter regarding Macedonia, but also, the entire part of Southern Macedonia, along with Thessaloniki, was promised to Belgrade (Documents..., 1962).

On one hand, the changes in the Balkans during the period between April 1939 and April 1941 increased Yugoslav interest in Northern Greece and Southern Albania. On the other hand, they objectively made it difficult for Bulgaria to undertake more decisive actions to assist the Bulgarians in Albania. The passive Bulgarian attitude to some extent was dependent on the fact that, at this stage of the Second World War, the country had no clear strategy on the Macedonian Question (Kochankov, 2007). Because of the increasing Yugoslav interest in Albania, in 1940, Milenko Filipovic published his book „Gollobordë“ in Skopje. In it, there is up-to-date statistical data from 1937 only for the settlements that were on Yugoslav territory. Statistical data for the villages in Albania was published from the period of the Balkan Wars and the First World War, and some migration processes from the 1920s were cursorily examined. In this publication, the Bulgarians in Albania are considered to be Serbs, and the region of Gollobordë is described as a „Serbian territory“ (Filipovic, 1940). The purpose of this publication was to act as a counterpoint to any future Italian claims regarding Yugoslavia.

However, once again on March 27th, 1941, everything in the Balkans was flipped upside down. A military coup d'état took place in Yugoslavia and the government that joined the country to the Tripartite Pact was de-

posed. This sudden change forced Hitler to order the attack on Yugoslavia on April 6th and the country was defeated within several days. On April 17th 1941, the high command of the Yugoslav Army signed its capitulation before German military representatives.

In the newly changed situation and the need of an urgent transfer of German troops to the east in relation to the planned attack on the USSR, the German authorities decided to concede Vardar Macedonia that they occupied to be administered by Bulgaria. In a telegram from the German Minister of Foreign Affairs Ribbentrop, sent on April 15th, 1941, to the German Legation in Sofia, it was explicitly stated that „the fate of the different regions of Yugoslavia will not be conclusively determined before reaching peace. Therefore, for the time being, no statements can be made regarding the political goals and the future borders of Macedonia“ (Documents..., 1962). In the same document, it is stated that for the propaganda targeting the Bulgarian population of Yugoslav Macedonia, the slogan „breaking off“ from Belgrade will be used. For the regions where it will be used though, the Italian claims for Yugoslav territories inhabited by Albanians must be taken into account.

Italy laid territorial claims even before the capitulation of Yugoslavia was declared. In information given by the Bulgarian Consul-General Iv. Slivenski in Tirana, it is stated that the Bulgarian colony there is seriously concerned by a telegram from „the Macedonian Albanians living in Tirana“ to the viceroy requesting the liberation of these Albanian lands. The concern also increased by the visit of the viceroy to Debar on April 11th, 1941, where it was requested that the city and the region to be joined to Albania (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 176K, i. 15, a.u. 9, p. 20). The Italian announcement that they have occupied Ohrid, which was considered to be a sacred Bulgarian place, „had the effect of a detonated bomb in Sofia“ (Kochankov, 2007).

On April 18th, a telegram was sent by Ribbentrop to the German legation in Sofia in which it was stated: „The Bulgarian Army is now permitted to take possession of... Macedonia, but for the time being, no further than the line Pirot – Vranja, Skopje and from there on following river Vardar to the Greek border... Please also inform the Bulgarian Government and add that the aforementioned occupation line in Macedonia is only temporary“. According to the German understanding for the territorial division west of this line, the Italian claims would be taken into account.

That same day Ribbentrop ordered the German Legation in Rome to inform Count Ciano that Germany was looking forward to Italy agreeing that „the Macedonian matters would be resolved having in mind the Bulgarian interest there so the entire territory south of the city of Ohrid and lake Ohrid, called by the Bulgarians a national sacred place, to fall under the sovereignty of Bulgaria“. Bulgarians troops began entering Yugoslav territory on April, 19th, but they did not have their own command. In the western parts of Macedonia, the cities that were not yet captured were Struga, Tetovo, Debar, Kichevo, Gostivar, and the narrow strip on the east shores of lake Prespa. After the German Army pulled out of them, they were invaded by Italian forces.

On April 19th, Tsar Boris III left for Germany where he met with Hitler. The Bulgarian Tsar was promised that Ohrid would be surrendered to the Bulgarians after the upcoming negotiations with the Italians. For this reason, on April 21st, 1941, Ribbentrop and Count Ciano initiated discussions in Vienna during which they coordinated the respective positions of Germany and Italy for the territorial and administrative changes in the Balkans. The two parties also discussed the matter of the contradictions between Bulgaria and Italy regarding Macedonia. At this meeting, the Italians gave their reasons for their claims – not with ethnographic, but with economic and military arguments. The experts included in the Italian delegation were also invited to voice their opinions during this meeting. They could not give satisfactory answers to the questions that Ribbentrop posed, and only noted that if the current border remained, Albania would be really narrow, and the distance to the sea – quite short. In addition to this, Count Ciano pointed out that Albania should have a double mountain chain as a border and to acquire some of the railways in Macedonia. He himself was prepared to yield to the border being at Lake Ohrid, so that this Bulgarian sacred place would remain on Bulgarian territory.

The meeting between Ribbentrop and Count Ciano ended on April 24th, with the definition of the so called Vienna Line. According to it, the larger part of Vardar Macedonia was to be administered by Bulgaria, and a wide belt in the western parts including the cities of Struga, Gostivar, Tetovo and the eastern shores of lake Prespa would be given to Albania. On April 27th, P. Draganov, the Bulgarian minister plenipotentiary in Berlin, informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations in Sofia that on the German side, permission was given to the Bulgarian troops

to enter the region west of Vardar River to the line Bitola – Brod – Tetovo – Kachanik. Bulgarian troops began moving west of this line towards the city of Ohrid on May 15th, after the Italian and German troops stationed there pulled out (Kochankov, 2007).

On July 21st, 1941, Bulgarian-Italian negotiations for finally determining the demarcation line started in Rome. During these negotiations, the Italian state peremptorily enforced the following principles:

1. The Vienna Line has already been determined in an agreement with Germany and will remain;

2. Regarding the Bulgarian claims, certain alterations could be tolerated, and they could be decided by a mixed committee that would research the situation on site. This was acceptable due to the fact that the Vienna Line was drawn on a map of the scale of 1:750 000, which could lead to some incorrect interpretations;

3. After conclusively defining the border, there must follow a population exchange.

From the Italian-German and the Italian-Bulgarian negotiations, it is evident that Germany, at the capitulation of the Yugoslav Army, became a supreme war-time sovereign of the former Yugoslav territories and given its status, it conceded the region of Western Macedonia to Italy, and the rest of Vardar Macedonia to Bulgaria.

On June 29th, 1941, Mussolini proclaimed that the civil competence of the Italian Armed Forces that occupied the territories of Kosovo, Debar, and Struga to be transferred to the Albanian puppet government. In Tirana, this decree was interpreted as if the aforementioned territories would join Albania definitively. To the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations in Sofia, however, this did not mean a permanently established international border, but a demarcation line beyond which lay „the districts under Italian occupation with an Albanian administration“.

The situation in the Bulgarian Zone in Vardar Macedonia was identical. On April 24th, 1941, Minister Plenipotentiary C. Clodius, Deputy Chief of the Department of Political Economy at the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Bulgarian Minister of Foreign Affairs I. Popov signed a document that clarified the status of the „parts of the former Yugoslav territory occupied by Bulgaria“ and the establishment of a Bulgarian Administration in Vardar Macedonia was discussed. In the text of this document, it is evident that the Bulgarian Government only takes on duties



*A Bulgarian sentry on the Bulgarian-Italian demarcation line in the region of Ohrid, 1942.*

*Source: Personal album of Yanko Gochev*

that guarantee the rights of the Germans in the occupied Macedonia and the Morava Valley that are designated as „regions conceded (by Germany, Ed.) to Bulgaria“. Nothing is said of the conditions under which these regions were „conceded“ or of the rights of Bulgaria over these regions. Nothing else is said, other than they would be defined after the war. This agreement guaranteed „the presence of German troops in these regions,“ the maintenance of which would be at the cost of Bulgaria. Despite this, the Bulgarian Government presented this act as a national unification. But in various German publications from this period, these lands were not indicated as being part of Bulgaria, and only as being „under Bulgarian administration“ or as a „German occupation zone given to Bulgaria for administration „ (Das Reich, 1942; Popov, 1993).

Despite the fact that the future borders of Albania and Bulgaria would be determined after signing peace treaties at the end of the war, Bulgarians and Albanians, who suffered together under the Yugoslav oppression and fought together against it, became rivals regarding this territory, in which

their national doctrines intertwined. The lands under Italian occupation and under Albanian administration in 1941 increased by 11,780 sq. km. of former Yugoslav territory and by around 820 thousand people. The entire territory, under Italian occupation and under Albanian administration, was divided administratively into 14 prefectures. The newly created prefectures, in which there was Bulgarian population, were mainly in Western Macedonia, which was incorporated into the Debar prefecture, with the subprefectures Tetovo, Gostivar, Kichevo, Reka, and Struga, and the region of Tsarev Dvor in the Resen region, was attached to the Korçë prefecture. The Bulgarians in Kosovo, living in the regions Prizren Gora, Podgora, and Župa were in the Prizren prefecture. With the government decree of October 18th 1941, in Tirana, all the residents of the aforementioned prefectures became Albanian citizens.

The dispute regarding the number of the Bulgarian population in the Italian Zone was especially harsh, as also was the dispute about the Albanian population in the Bulgarian Zone in Macedonia (Panchev, 2018). These contradictions directly affected the fate of the Albanian population in the Bulgarian administrative zone in Macedonia, as well as the Bulgarian population in Western Macedonia under Albanian administration, and this also reflected on the situation of the Bulgarians within the internationally recognised borders of Albania up until 1941. The inclusion of new territories with a Bulgarian population led to a significant increase in the number of people of Bulgarian nationality under Albanian administration, which was an additional factor in the stabilization of the Bulgarians within the old borders of Albania, most of whom continued living in compactly populated villages. This was a precondition for preserving their identity. The request from July 23, 1941, of Ibrahim Abduhraman Kuka to the Ministry of Education in Tirana, who for the past 10 years had been an Albanian teacher in the village of Klenjë, Gollobordë is stored in the Central Archive of Albania. In his request, he insists on being transferred to another region, as in the village of Klenjë his own children cannot properly learn their native language – Albanian. In the document it is stated: „As it is well known, the Bulgarian language is spoken in the families of this village and under these conditions, my three children are divided between two languages: at home they listen to their mother tongue, and among their local friends they listen to Bulgarian or, what is even worse, an entirely twisted Albanian. This fact resulted in these children managing to learn a mixed language, completely



tasteless, and the external influence on them is so great that ultimately they do not know, nor will they ever will the basics of their mother tongue or Bulgarian“ (AQSH. F. 195. V. 1941. D. 137. Fl. 16; Panchev, 2018).

With the territorial and administrative changes that rapidly occurred, the appearance of the Bulgarian community in Albania also changed. If before 1941, it was dominated by local Bulgarians, living in the eastern parts of the territories within the internationally recognised borders, and Bulgarians immigrants from Vardar Macedonia represented a relatively small group, then after 1941, the group of Bulgarians from Western Macedonia became dominant. Because of this, the attention of the Bulgarian diplomatic mission in Tirana turned primarily to them.

For the needs of the residential administration, the new Italian-Albanian authorities that were established on the territory of former Yugoslavia gathered information about the total population there and also about its demographic characteristics, such as ethnicity and religion, native language, etc. For this purpose, at first they used a modernized version of the data extracted from the statistics of the latest census of the population of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1931, as well as the current demographical statistics. The Italian-Albanian authorities reckoned that this statistical information, albeit having their reservations, matched the actual demographic situation. In the official Yugoslav publications of this census, however, only the religious affiliation of the population was indicated, but not its ethnic composition (Royaume de Yougoslavie, Statistique générale d'état, 1938).

On November 13th 1941, the High Commissariat for Kosovo, Debar, and Struga prepared a list of the population by gender and religious affiliation for the different districts and settlements (Panchev, 2018). According to this data, the total number of the population in the regions in Western Macedonia under Italian occupation with an Albanian administration was 250,383 people, of whom 141,608 or 56.56% were Muslims, and 108,735 people or 43.43% were Orthodox Christians. Only 32 people professed another religion. By regions, the population was distributed as follows: in the Debar prefecture there were 237,204 people, of which 138,524 people or 58.4% were Muslims, and the Orthodox Christians numbered 98,640 or 41.58%. In the province Tsarev Dvor in the Korçë prefecture, the total number of the population was 13,179 people, of whom 3,084 or 23.4% were Muslims, and 10,995 people or 76.6% were Orthodox Christians.

In the first period of the Italian occupation, the new authorities regarded the Bulgarian population favourably. With the escalation of the Italian-Bulgarian dispute for determining the demarcation line, the Bulgarian population started being oppressed. Similar repressive measures were enforced on the Bulgarians, living within the old borders of Albania before 1941. In a report by the Bulgarian military reconnaissance in Skopje to the Minister of War General Penev, it is stated that before May 23rd, 1941, the attitude of the Italian military, administrative, and financial officials toward the Bulgarians in territories they occupied in Western Macedonia was very cautious. Gathering of the population in large groups was permitted and they also were able to pass through the demarcation line without any documents, talking to Bulgarian officers, who visited the cities Tetovo, Struga, etc., displaying Bulgarian flags on buildings along with the Italian and the German flags. In this period, the Bulgarian population restored their Bulgarian names according to the system that is used in their mother tongue, instead of the names that were imposed on them by the authorities in Belgrade using the system for names conforming in the Serbian language. From May 23rd, however, the situation drastically changed. According to Bulgarian military reconnaissance, this was due to the appointment of a city administration in Tetovo consisting only of Serbs, Serbophiles, and Muslims. As a result of this, the Bulgarian population was forbidden to cross the demarcation line, and all German and Bulgarian flags were taken down (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 176K, i. 21, a.u. 2834, p. 17-19).

The changes that occurred were made very clear by the arrest of a number of Bulgarians notables from Struga – Dr. Hristo Gruev, Stefan Tomanov, owner of hotel “Tourist“, and Vladimir Ivanov, a merchant of manufactured goods – that was carried out on May 20th, 1942. The same day, they were taken to Tirana and according to their relatives: „This is being done by the local authorities in order to frighten the few active Bulgarians in Struga“. During their interrogation, the Bulgarians stated that „in the past Albanians and Bulgarians stood together against the Serbian slavery and they did not understand why they now have to be harassed by the Albanian authorities“. The arrested citizens of Struga were released after the intervention of Bulgarian Consul-General I. Slivenski in Tirana, who at the time of their release stated that „Bulgaria today is so strong and possesses so many means for action, both political and economic, that we will not let

a single hair fall from the head of a single Bulgarian in Albania“ (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 176K, i. 8, a.u. 1097, p. 31-32).

On July 4th, 1942, the Bulgarian Consul-General in Tirana, I. Slivenski, met with the Albanian Prime Minister, Mustafa Kruja, to discuss the matter of „the many cases of incidents near the border and the bad treatment of the Bulgarians in Albania“. As a counter request, the Albanian side brought forward the matter of the 2,600 Albanians, „banished by Bulgaria (meaning the Bulgarian Zone in Vardar Macedonia, Ed.)“. In his information to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations, I. Slivenski made an analysis of the Italian interest in provoking a Bulgarian-Albanian conflict. „1. The Italians created Great Albania and 2. The Italians must have troops in Albania to protect its borders. Against whom? Obviously, against Bulgaria. The Bulgarian danger, this is the great argument, as it appears, just in time, to justify the stay of the Italians in Albania, as well as the necessity for Albania to seek protection from Italy. The Bulgarian danger, however, must be popularized. The passions must be inflamed... A great perspective for the Italians in Albania“.

Under these conditions of increasing tension, on November 8th, 1942, one of the leaders of the Bulgarian community, Dimko Matov, was assassinated in Tirana.<sup>26</sup> On November 25th, 1942, information about him was sent by a special courier of the Bulgarian general consulate in Tirana which states „Dimko was targeted by the authorities. He was born in Struga, he knew all the people in the city and the district. His house had turned into a hotel for Strugans and Kichevans. Dimko was always the first to know what was going on in Struga and always informed the consulate. He helped the poorer Bulgarians who arrived in Tirana with money and free accommodations. The holiday of Saint Cyril and Methodius, as well as the other holidays in the colony, were practically organized by him each time. He had a strong Bulgarian spirit... The murder of Dimko constitutes an extraordinarily heavy blow for all Bulgarians, not only in Tirana, but also in Struga and Kichevo. Everyone is scared and afraid of being caught up by the same fate... What our reaction will be is a political question about which I cannot speak. But I am bound to mention that after the murder of Dimko, all Bulgarians are possessed by fear and will not dare show their

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<sup>26</sup> Dimko Stefanov Matov is the nephew of one of the leaders and a prominent theoretician from the IMRO Hristo Matov, and also of Milan Matov, one of the leaders of the Bulgarian-Albanian anti-Serbian Ohrid-Debar uprising in 1913.

Bulgarian feelings, they will stop coming to the consulate anymore and they will try to adapt, as best as they can, to the local factors“.

An investigation carried out by the Bulgarian Consulate General in Tirana determined that the murder of Dimko Matov was carried out „on the orders of a militia legion“. Local sources indicate that the actual murderer was a person who carried out an assassination attempt on Ahmed Zogu several years earlier. According to I. Slivenski, this person was most probably Ndok Gjeloši, „who carried out the second assassination attempt on Zogu in Vienna ...a dangerous man, he has committed many murders and now receives a hefty paycheck from the Italians“.

The participation of the Italian occupational authorities in the assassination of Dimko Matov led to the mobilization of the Albanian public opinion and open manifestations of solidarity with the Bulgarians. In his report, the Bulgarian Consul-General, I. Slivenski, notes that „half of Tirana attended the funeral. The service was carried out by head of the Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Kisi, and at the grave, Vissarion, the second Albanian Metropolitan, was present ... All my acquaintances to whom I talked, compared the funeral of Dimko to the one of Zogu's mother... At the funeral, there were also many people, who wanted to show their condemnation of the murder with their presence and to have a silent protest against the authorities... From mouth to mouth, it was spread that „Dimko Bulgar Furnaxhi“ (this is how they called him here) was murdered by the militia and that this murder was a great sin“ (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 176K, i. 8, a.u. 1105, p. 111 – 116).

The discontent of the Albanian population under the Italian occupation incited the patriotically inclining circles in Tirana to seek contacts with the Bulgarian diplomatic mission, with the purpose of finding an acceptable solution to the similar problems both nations had. In January, 1942, the Consul-General in Tirana, I. Slivenski, was visited by the former prime minister of Albania, Mehdi Frashëri. According to the Albanian politician, the situation was getting more difficult for Italy. Frashëri thought that if the Italians got demoralized, the Albanians would easily disarm the Italian troops in Albania. A great danger, however, was posed by the Greeks and the Serbs. This threat created the necessity of protecting Bulgarian-Albanian interests and removing all current obstacles to the interaction between the two countries. Frashëri requested that in a future Albanian uprising against the Italians, Bulgaria would stay neutral and the existing demarcation line

to remain temporarily unchanged. After establishing new Albanian authorities, Tirana would agree to revise the line in Western Macedonia (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 176K, i. 15, a.u. 27, p. 6 – 10).

Later, Mehdi Frasheri met with I. Slivenski again. During this meeting, he expressed the position that in the case that the Axis powers were successful, Albania would never accept its status of an Italian colony and would fight for its independence. From this point of view, he believed that it was in the interest of Bulgaria to have a border with an independent Albania, and not with the powerful great power Italy (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 1503K, i. 1, a.u. 21, p. 302 – 303).

Due to these conditions, Albanian armed resistance began and it was pursued by the Italian occupational authorities. The Bulgarians in Albania were also subjected to terror, as the goal of Italy was to attenuate their Bulgarian self-consciousness, so they would be denationalized more easily. Similar to the Austro-Hungarian policy in Albania during the First World War, Italy began to pressure the people not to call themselves Bulgarians, and allowed and encouraged only the usage of the regional demonym „Macedonians“. The Italian authorities openly campaigned among the local population that it did not have anything to do with the Bulgarians, and was a separate nationality, that is more closely related to the Albanians. In Kichevo, the Italians confiscated Bulgarian books from people's houses and took down the portraits of the Bulgarian Tsar's family (Kolanović, 2003). In a confidential report sent on March 15th, 1943, from Tirana to the chief of staff of the army in Sofia, it is stated that the local authorities „incited by the Italian official authorities, treat the Bulgarians very fiercely. The Bulgarians have been arrested for no reason, their personal items have been confiscated from their homes under any pretence, and they were subjected to fines. Beating is something common now. Going lower into the mountains, this attitude becomes more favourable to the Bulgarians under Albanian authority... The Italian soldiers have always treated them well, but always have called them „Macedonians“ instead of Bulgarians. This annoys the Bulgarian population in many places, and people avoid having contact with the soldiers. There are no prospects for the situation of the Bulgarians to get better“ (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 176K, i. 15, a.u. 27, p. 21).

During the persecution of the Bulgarian population by the Italian authorities, there were some paradoxical cases, for example there were court

sentences for „propaganda for the benefits of Bulgaria“, and the convicted people were declared as Macedonians. Such is the case of Kosta Tsvetkov, who was noted as a Macedonian with Decision 3 from August 13th, 1942 by the Korçë district committee, and the deed for which he was being punished and sentence to internment for one year was because he „is a dangerous person and spreads propaganda for the benefits of Bulgaria“ (Appendices, facsimile 12). From this ruling, it is evident that there was also a process to change surnames began – instead of Tsvetkov, his surname is written as Tsvetko. This type of arbitrary ruling and terror concerned not only the Bulgarians in Western Macedonia, but also the Bulgarians within the old borders of Albania. According to incomplete data gathered by the Bulgarian Consulate General in Tirana, of the 23 Bulgarians murdered in 1942, two were from within the old borders of Albania: Kristo Ivan Dukovski from Urbele and Boris Georgiev Hadzhiev from Karchishta.

In this tense environment, the authorities in Tirana made the decision in October to take a census of the population of the newly annexed territories by Albania as early as January, 1942. The census form drawn up was named „Declaration for Counting the Population.“ Column 14, dealt with religious affiliation and the description states: „To indicate the person's faith, for each person, write: Muslim, autocephalous Orthodox, Serb, Exarchist, Orthodox Bulgarian, Catholic or other.“ This raises the question why Exarchists were put into a separate group from the Orthodox Bulgarians, given the fact that, except for the Bulgarian Exarchate, there was no other church institution, to which the Orthodox Bulgarians could have been affiliated. It is also not clear whether the Bulgarian Muslims were given the opportunity to declare themselves as such. Column 15 of the form deals with the mother tongue. The instructions state that the interviewees should indicate „the language that they have spoken since childhood. To indicate the dialect or the language that they have spoken since childhood, the persons must choose from the following: Albanian, Bulgarian, Greek, or others“. In column 17, the ethnicity of one's father was to be indicated, and in column 18, of the mother. The acceptable choices given were as „Albanian, Greek, Romanian, Bulgarian, Serb, and other“.

Throughout the entire period of the census preparation, the Bulgarian diplomatic mission in Tirana, as well as the officials of the Bulgarian Administration in Vardar Macedonia, followed the process of organization and compilation of the data, with the numerous inaccuracies and problems



that would obstruct the clarification of the real number of the Bulgarian population in these lands (Panchev, 2018).

From October 1st to October 10th, 1942, the Italian-Albanian authorities in Western Macedonia took the official population census. In a confidential letter by the Bitola District Directorate at the Ministry of the Interior from October 7th, 1942, to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations, it is stated that „according to the additional intelligence that the District Directorate has from Struga, in many of the villages, the Albanian authorities tasked with the census insisted and threatened out fellow countrymen to identify themselves as „Albanian“ by origin... A decision was made to impose the strictest of measures so the entire population declared itself as Albanian; where this cannot be achieved by threats or pressure, bribes should be used... Having this in mind, it should be expected that many of our compatriots will declare themselves to be Albanian“ (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 176K, i. 32, a.u. 83, p. 2). On October 27, 1942, the Bitola District Directorate at the Ministry of the Interior once again, via a confidential letter, informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations that „the declaration in the census that are written in Albanian, are not given to the heads of the families to fill in, but instead, lists are compiled for every household by the officials tasked with the job... No one counts the properties, the inventory, the livestock, etc. It is assumed that those lists would later be used to fill out the declarations without the residents in question having signed them. For this reason, it cannot be controlled how the data for column 18, where ethnic origin is indicated, would be gathered „ (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 176K, i. 32, a.u. 83, p. 4). In a similar document from October 30th, 1942, it is stated that „during the census, the data is gathered using lists of the households, and the Bulgarians are coerced to admit that they are Albanian by origin, meaning they are indicated as „Shqipetars“. There are also cases in which the columns for nationality and religion are left empty, so they can be filled in later by the authorities themselves, however they see fit“ (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 176K, i. 32, a.u. 83, p. 5).

The Bulgarian Administration attempted to gather evidence of specific malpractice in the process of taking a census on the other side of the demarcation line. In a letter by the Bitola District Directorate at the Ministry of the Interior from November 24th, 1942, examples of striking violations are mentioned. „In the village of Karabunica that has 76 Bulgarian

households, with 420 residents in total, due to great harassment, only 21 people were indicated as Bulgarians in the census forms, 3 were indicated as Serbs, and all the rest were indicated as Albanians... In the village of Kladnik, which is entirely Bulgarian and has 78 households with around 500 residents, all of the people were indicated as Albanians. The situation in the village of Sarbyani in the Karabunica commune is the same and the village was renamed "Lyria" by the Albanian authorities. This village has 83 households with around 560 residents, around a hundred of whom are Turks. Both Bulgarians and Turks were indicated as Albanians, despite their reluctance and after a minor incident in which the census forms were torn, even though none of them speak Albanian". (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 176K, i. 32, a.u. 83, p. 11).

Despite all these flaws, the Albanian-Italian census in Western Macedonia, taken in October of 1942, is of significant scientific interest. A total 234,783 people were registered as living on this territory (Appendices, table 12). According to the reported results about the ethnic composition of this population, the majority is of people indicated they were Albanians – 60.83%, 30.98% indicated they were Bulgarians, and 8.18% indicated they were Serbs.

When comparing the results of the census taken in 1942 with the data from the end of the Yugoslav regime, several important differences can be found. If in 1941, the total number of the population in these territories was 250,383 people, this means that in a period a little longer than a year, the population decreased by 15,600 people, which amounts to 6.23%. At the same time, if the number of Orthodox Christians in 1941 according to the Yugoslav statistics was 108,735 people and in 1942, a total of 91,960 were registered as Orthodox Christians (Bulgarians and Serbs), then this group decreased by 16,775 people. The process is reversed for the Muslim population. In 1942, they increased by 1,215 people. From the statistical data, it is evident that all Muslims, including Turks, Roma Muslims, and the Bulgarian Muslims (also known throughout this region as Torbeshi), were also registered as Albanians. The significance of this problem is especially large for Kosovo, where a population census was also taken in 1943 and there, all the Bulgarian Muslims were registered as Albanians.

On the basis of the political notes exchanged between Bulgaria and Italy regarding the census taken of the population in 1942 in the regions in Vardar Macedonia under Italian occupation and with Albanian administra-

tion, several interesting conclusions about the people registered as Serbs can be made. For example, after the census was taken, special certificates for ethnic affiliation were issued. The Bulgarian Administration managed to acquire several of these documents and the Bulgarian authorities sent an inquiry to the Italian authorities about the owners of these documents. For example, in the official response of the Italian legation in Sofia from June 2nd, 1943, it is stated that the people Mane Tasev, Velimir Genadiev, Stoyan Mitrev, and Veliko Stoimirov were Albanians of Serbian descent. It is notable that in the response, in parallel to the names being written according to the Bulgarian surname system, Albanized names were also used, namely: Mane Kuzmani, Velimir Gyuri, Stoyan Petro, Velimir Risto (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 176K, i. 32, a.u. 83, p. 14). This example clearly shows that after the changes in April, 1941, and the establishment of the Italian occupational authority, the people in question restored their Bulgarian names, but they were later pressured to undergo a process of de-Bulgarization.

Another important aspect of the population census in the Italian occupation zone under Albanian administration is that, despite the Italian policy for imposing their regional demonym to the Bulgarians, there are no cases of people being registered as Macedonians.

Having in mind the flaws in the manner in which the census was taken, it is difficult to say exactly what share of the changes in the population are due to natural processes and what share is due to migration or assimilation. In any case, however, it is clear there was expulsion of the Bulgarian population out of this region. Some of these people migrated to the inner parts of Albania and mostly to the capital Tirana, while the majority of the migration flow headed to the Bulgarian Zone in Vardar Macedonia. A similar conclusion was confirmed by the fact that in April of 1943, the number of refugees from the regions in Western Macedonia under Italian occupation and under Albanian administration was estimated to be around 12,000 people (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 176K, i. 8, a.u. 1197, p. 84 – 85). The large number of refugees was also established by the numerous rallies protesting against the conditions of life in Western Macedonia that were carried out in Skopje on September 12th, 1943, in which around 10,000 refugees from these districts took part (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 176K, i. 8, a.u. 1197, p. 75 – 76).



*Bulgarian refugees who fled from the Italian occupation zone, in 1943, accommodated in the city of Ohrid*

*Source: Album of Yanko Gochev*

Throughout the entire period of the Italian occupation of Albania, the Italian military authorities subjected the Bulgarian population to persecution. At the end of 1943, the Association of the Macedonian Cultural, Educational and Benevolent Brotherhoods in Bulgaria published an obituary, in which they attached a list of Bulgarians killed after April 6th, 1941. In the districts of Debar and Galichnik, that were under Italian occupation, throughout this period, 34 Bulgarians were murdered, of whom 4 were born in the region of Poletto within the borders of Albania before 1941. For the same period, in the Prespa district, 2 Bulgarians were murdered. On September 2nd, 1943, Hr. Minkov, the Bulgarian consul in Tirana, stated that „the entirely Bulgarian village of Glombochane situated on lake Prespa with 52 houses and population of around 500 people“ was completely burned down by Italian troops, who were pursuing an Albanian band. Along with burning down the village, the Italians also pillaged everything and left the population without any food. The people requested urgent help, at first

with food and money, in order to rebuild their homes before the winter. The Bulgarian consul met with representatives of the Italian High Command in Tirana and requested that they not persecute the Bulgarian Prespa villages in Albania „because the population there is peaceful and does not take part in the revolutionary actions of the Albanians against the Italians“ (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 176K, i. 15, a.u. 63, p. 98). From a demographic point of view, the information of the Bulgarian Consulate General in Tirana about the village of Glombochani in Mala Prespa shows that, despite the military situation, its population was increasing. While in 1935 the number of houses in it was 39 with 409 residents, in 1939 the houses were 45 in number, and in 1943 the number of houses was already 52, with 500 residents – the average household size was 9.62 people.

The diplomatic steps that the Bulgarian Government took with the Italian authorities regarding the improvement of the situation of the Bulgarians in the territories under Italian occupation and under Albanian administration, did not bear any results. Because of this reason, besides accepting refugees from this zone, on October 14th, 1942, the Bulgarian Government adopted Ordinance 48, which permitted up to 50 thousand sheep to spend the winter on Bulgaria territory. Their offspring, as well as the wool, cheese, butter, etc., produced by the livestock while staying in Bulgaria would not be subject to export tariffs and other taxes upon returning the sheep back across the border. Besides this, the owners were also relieved of duties and all other taxes for the import and export of their sheep (State Gazette, 1942). Later, it became clear that only the sheep living in Albania had the necessity of such a winter stay, due to which, on January 27th, 1943, the new Ordinance 14 was adopted with which the Bulgarians sheep-breeders from Albania, who spent the winter on the territory administered by Bulgaria, were supplied with 300 tons of grain fodder at for feeding the sheep, the payment for which would be fulfilled later in kind with the wool sheared in the spring of 1943 (State Gazette, 1943). Because some of the sheep were feeble and could not endure an early shearing, on May 3rd, 1943, the directorate of „Civil Mobilization“ gave its consent for 10% of the sheep to be taken out of Bulgarian territory unsheared. With this and similar actions Bulgaria tried to aid animal husbandry life of the Bulgarians in Albania.

A sudden change in the situation in Albania occurred on July 25th, 1943, when the Italian fascist dictator Benito Mussolini was deposed and the new government of P. Badoglio was formed. It began seeking contact

with the anti-Hitler coalition with the purpose of signing a truce with the most favourable conditions for Italy. The truce was signed on September 3rd, and announced on September 8th, 1943. The situation in the Albania, which was still occupied, intensified when bands of communists, nationalists, and Zogists (followers of the dethroned Albanian king Ahmed Zog) united for joint actions against the Italians and surrounded the capital, with the intent of forming a provisional Albanian government that would declare the independence of the country.

In response to these actions, the Italian High Command in Albania deployed new troops in Tirana. On August 5th, 1943, with a decree issued by the viceroy, the entire territory of Albania was effectively declared as war zone with all the consequences that stem from this regarding the penal code. The events in Italy were reflected in not only old Albania, but also in the territories of the former Yugoslavia compactly populated by Bulgarians, who were under Italian occupation under Albanian administration. Due to the inability of the Italian military authorities to control the situation in the country, the willingness of these territories in Western Macedonia, populated primarily by Bulgarians, to be joined to the Bulgarian Zone for was expressed the first time. Because of the complicated international situation and the probable negative outcome of the Second World War for the countries of the Axis, Bulgaria rejected this offer. This course taken by the Bulgarian Government was evaluated by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs as „even more cautious foreign-political behaviour“.

On August 10th, 1943, while preparing for another meeting between Tsar Boris and Hitler, the Tsar and the Prime Minister B. Filov agreed regarding the position of the Bulgarian side not to engage further in the war. The prime minister thought that the Germans had to give freedom to the Albanians. The Tsar shared this idea and assumed the task of suggesting it during his talks in Germany (Kochankov, 2007). To the German proposition for the occupation of these parts of the Albanian administrative zone, in which the majority of the population was Bulgarian, Tsar Boris responded with: „We do not need apples from Tetovo in this hot weather“ (Filov, 1990).

In this situation and the increasing probability that Italy could leave the Axis and all the anarchy and chaos that would transpire in Albania that would stem from this, the Germans took measures to defend the Albanian coastline and maintain order in the country. The first measure was to over-



take and adapt Albanian airports for actions of a greater scale and the deployment of 3,000 German air-force specialists.

Right after the capitulation of Italy in September of 1943, the pro-Italian members of the puppet government in Tirana were replaced with people with a pro-German orientation. An executive committee was formed to decide to convoke the National Assembly of Albania, which would elect a new Albanian government. The national assembly gathered on October 18th, 1943 and elected a Regent Council with Mehdi Frasheri at the head and new Albanian government, led by Rexhep Mitrovica. The new Albanian government declared „the independence of the country and its liberation from Italian occupation“, but at the same time, Albania was occupied by German troops, who established complete control. Germany recognized the formal sovereignty of Albania, without the country having the status of a German ally.

The uncertain situation in Albania forced many Bulgarians, who after April of 1941 migrated to the inner parts of the country primarily from the regions in Western Macedonia with Albanian administration, to flee the country. Only in September of 1943, the Bulgarian Consulate General in Tirana issued documents for 93 Bulgarians, allowing them to cross the demarcation line and settle in the territory under Bulgarian administrative control (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 325, i. 1, a.u. 252).

The situation became even more complicated when on September 12th, 1943, during an operation by the German special forces, Mussolini was rescued from captivity and put at the head of a puppet regime in Northern Italy. Despite that, the German and the Italian command agreed that the Italian Army would completely leave the regions of Kosovo, Tetovo, Kichevo, Debar, Struga, Korçë, and Tirana, when resolving numerous matters concerning Italy, Germany had an interest in having relations with the new fascist government of Mussolini. Because of this, the Germans thought that the agreement between Ribbentrop and Count Ciano about the Vienna Demarcation Line was still in effect (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 176K, i. 15, a.u. 64, p. 102).

In the following period, Germany offered Bulgaria the right to seize the regions of Western Macedonia inhabited primarily by Bulgarians several times, but every time, this was met with a rejection, with the reason that the country could not afford to send their troops there. The official Bulgarian demands were reduced to insistent requests to the German gov-

ernment to take upon the defence of the Bulgarian population. Because of anarchy this situation created, the Bulgarians were subjected to a cross-fire from Albanian, Serbian, and communist armed forces. The Albanian provisional committee tried hard to normalize public life in the country, but its authority was weak and extended only to Tirana and the communication arteries that the Germans troops guarded. A fundamental reason for the lack of success was noted by the Bulgarian Consulate General as early as October 24th, 1943. Their report stated that there reigned a „deeply rooted feeling in everyone that the game for Germany is lost“ (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 176K, i. 8, a.u. 1192, p. 85 – 87).

During the battles of the communist squads against the Italians, and later on against the German occupation forces, Bulgarian military reconnaissance stated several times that the attacks were taking place close to the settlements inhabited by Bulgarians, in this way, aiming to direct the relevant punitive measures precisely against the Bulgarian population. Several cases are recorded in which the Bulgarian army rescued the local Bulgarians by various means. For example, on March 15th, 1944, in the area of Bigla, the communist band of Dilko Bogoev attacked a German military convoy, during which 6 German soldiers were killed in. The same day, German troops arrived from the Korçë region to investigate the matter. Fearing repressions, the local Bulgarian leaders travelled to the Bulgarian border detachment in the village of Stenie to ask for help. The Bulgarian officers proposed that the villagers leave the village and at the same time, the Bulgarian soldiers secretly blew up the bridges on the way to the village. The next day, the German troops that tried to follow them could not pass through the terrain and to execute its punitive actions. In his way the Bulgarian population was rescued (Todoroska, 2014).

The invasion of the Soviet Army in the regions Bessarabia and Bukovina, controlled by Romania, caused unrest among the ruling circles in the Balkans. There was a common belief that the Germans were falling back and it would be difficult for them to hold the region. The Albanian Government was trying to find a way out and an opportunity to secure its current borders. In relation to this, the representative of the Regent Council, M. Frasheri, had a meeting with I. Minkov, the Bulgarian Consul in Tirana in March of 1944 and displayed an interest in the situation of Bulgaria and the Bulgarian position regarding the future of Macedonia and Thrace in relation to the Russian advances and British policy.

Frasheri thought that the position of the Serbs and the Greeks in London was strong and because of this, he sought the protection of Bulgaria and its cooperation. During this meeting, Frasheri was assured that „to us (the Bulgarians, Ed.) this matter does not exist and we are firmly intent on completing our national unification and not allowing the Serbs and Greeks place themselves in Macedonia and Thrace again“ (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 176K, i. 20, a.u. 76, p. 2). On June 12th, 1944, the Bulgarian Consul-General in Tirana announced his support for the normalization of relations between Bulgaria and Albania and took on the task of bringing the question of recognizing the independence of Albania before the prime minister (Kochankov, 2007).

On July 14th, 1944, the Regent Council in Sofia discussed the relations between Bulgaria and Albania. Several days later, the Bulgarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Parvan Draganov, held a discussion in Sofia with A. Kochi, the representative of the Albanian Government. During this meeting, it was stated that the new Bulgarian Government would uphold a policy that would ensure that „the Balkans will be for the Balkan people“. In relation to this, Bulgaria wanted to maintain good relations with Albania, but the unsettled matters and primarily the one regarding the situation of the Bulgarian minority was in the way of normal contacts and it would have been better to reach an agreement regarding it. According to P. Draganov, if it was not reached, others would determine the borders in the Balkans (Draganov, 1993). These words of the Bulgarian minister of foreign affairs turned out to be prophetic. At the beginning of September of 1944, another geopolitical change occurred in the Balkans and it severed the continuation of the contacts between the two states to this end. Both the Albanian and the Bulgarian administrations were forced to leave the territories that belonged to the restored state of Yugoslavia.

### 3.2. Bulgarians in Albania under the blow of Macedonism

Macedonism<sup>27</sup> as an ideology was introduced to Albania by the few communist groups that were under the influence of the Comintern. According to the memoirs of M. Ognyanov, in 1937, the Albanian communist of Bulgarian descent Vasil Shantoya shared „the Comintern proposition of a Macedonism” among the local Bulgarians for the first time . In this period however, the Bulgarians in Albania, including those with communist beliefs, were not influenced by it. For example Hristo Temelkov (Kristo Temelko) from the village of Vrabnik, who was one of the founders of the Albanian Communist Party (ACP), actively participated in the important Bulgarian celebrations like the Day of Saint Cyril and Saint Methodius, Ilinden, etc during the second half of the 1930s, that were organized together with the Bulgarian Legation and the local Bulgarian community. About him, M. Ognyanov wrote that „he self-identified as a Macedonian Bulgarian, and the Albanians thought of him as such, even when he became a partisan general“ (Ognyanov, 2002).

With the development of military actions during World War II, however, there was a shift in the political layers and the influence of the communist movement in Albania increased. On October 12th, 1943, Hr. Minkov, the Bulgarian Consul-General in Tirana, informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations, that three fundamental groups were operating in Albania. The nationalists of Balli Kombëtar had the weakest influence, followed by the Zogists. The communists were the most influential and most organized (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 176K, i. 8, a.u. 1192, p. 63 – 65).

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<sup>27</sup> Macedonism is a political doctrine is based on the idea of existence in the past and at the present time of a Macedonian identity manifested as a separate Macedonian nation, language, and culture different than Bulgarian. It was developed by the Serbian politician Stojan Novaković, who in 1888 wrote: „Because the Bulgarian idea, as we all know, has deep roots in Macedonia, I reckon that it is impossible for these ideas to be shaken off by opposing them only to the Serbian idea. This idea, I’m afraid, would not be in a position as a pure and plain contrast to push out the Bulgarian notion and because of this the Serbian idea will need some kind of an ally, who would firmly oppose Bulgarian nationalism and who would possess the elements that could attract the people and their feelings, separating it from Bulgarians nationalism. This ally I see in Macedonism“. In 1934, a resolution of the Comintern was adopted in which for the first time the existence of a separate Macedonian nation and a Macedonian language was supported . This resolution was actively used by the Yugoslav communists after 1944.

An important feature at the time of the foundation of the Albanian Communist Party (ACP) on November 8th, 1941, was that it was founded with the active help of the Yugoslav communists, which was responsible for a strong Yugoslav influence. The Central Committee of the League of the Communists of Yugoslavia had an official representative in Tirana, who participated in the affairs of the Albanian communists and applied pressure on them. For example, during the Berat Plenum of the Central Committee of ACP in 1943, the Yugoslav emissaries made an attempt to depose Enver Hoxha, as they considered him to be an obstacle on the path of achieving their own goals.

Yugoslav interest in Albania increased after the Second Conference of the Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia (ACN-LY) that took place on November 29th and 30th of 1943 in the city of Jajce. At this conference, the decision for the future federative structure of was conclusively adopted. It stated that Macedonia was to be part of the Yugoslav Federation. The League of the Communists in Yugoslavia (LCY) began to push the ideology of Comintern Macedonism even more actively, and through the Yugoslav communist representatives, it exerted pressure outside the borders of Yugoslavia, including in Albania, Greece, and Bulgaria. The ACP was informed of the course adopted by LCY regarding Macedonian matters by Svetozar Vukmanović Tempo as early as September of 1943. Having in mind the Yugoslav influence in Albania throughout the examined period, the murder of one of the founders of the Albanian Communist Party Vasil Shantoya is still quite a mystery<sup>28</sup>. He died in 1944 as leader of the Albanian delegation, returning after a meeting with J. B. Tito.

Another factor that allowed the spread of Macedonism was the complex and inconsistent relations between the various groups in the Albanian liberation movement. In 1942, Ballists and communists cooperated with each other for a short period, but the Albanian communists realized that given the development of the political situation it would not be possible to directly annex Kosovo to Albania, and the interaction between the two

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<sup>28</sup> Vasil Shantoya (Shanto, Shantov) was born in 1913 in the family of the bakers Petrush and Avidanka Shantov, Bulgarians, who migrated from Bitola to the city of Shkodra. In 1931, Vasil Shantoya became a member of the first Albanian Communist Party. He was arrested by the Albanian authorities for being a communist in 1938, but he was released in 1940 after the Italian occupation. He was murdered under unclear circumstances on February 1st, 1944, after he returned from a meeting with J. B. Tito.

groups did not last. At the same time, despite its anti-communist ideology, Balli Kombëtar treated the communists carefully, because they reckoned that if the victory of the Allies was not coordinated with the Anglo-American landing in the Balkans, a communist government would be established in Albania. In this period, while the Ballists chased the Yugoslav communist bands, who operated on the territory of the former Yugoslavia under Italian, and later under German occupation and with Albanian administration, the squads of the ACP were not only tolerated, but also interacted with the Yugoslav partisans. Besides this, there were cases, when stemming from the Albanian-Bulgarian disagreements about the demarcation line, the Albanian administrative authorities even let in and gave sanctuary to the Yugoslav communist groups, who were persecuted by the Bulgarian authorities. This practice additionally assisted the Macedonist propaganda in Albania.

The Soviet Army moved south of Danube River at the beginning of September, 1944, and this conclusively decided the fate of the Balkan nations. In October of 1944, the Bulgarian Army once again seized Vardar Macedonia, after which they carried out the Kosovo operation, which resulted in German troops being destroyed or pushed back from the central parts of the Balkans. The Albanian partisans surrounded the German detachments in Albania and took them prisoners. Despite the fact that Balli Kombëtar put up armed resistance up until December, 1944, on October 29th, a communist regime with Enver Hoxha at its head was established in Albania.

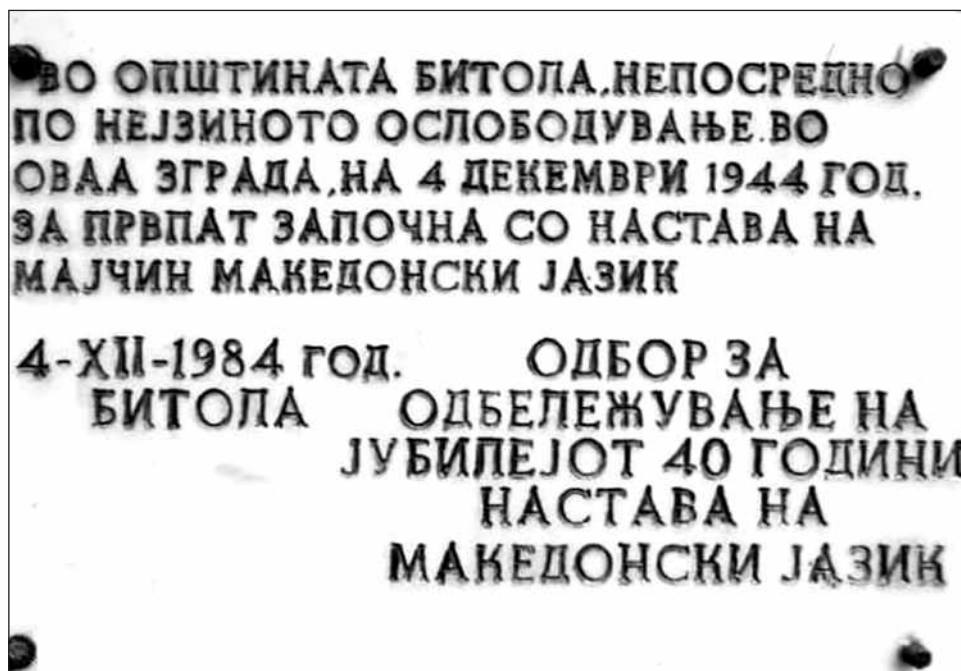
In all the countries in the Balkans, in which the communist parties seized power and in which there were people related to the geographical area of Macedonia, an official propaganda of the Macedonism began. During this period, only the representatives of the Macedonian Liberation Movement who had emigrated, held the position that the population in the geographical area Macedonia, whose language is a part of the Slavic language group of languages, were ethnically Bulgarian. The editor-in-chief of the newspaper "Macedonian Tribune" Lyuben Dimitrov published the book „Why Macedonia Should be Free and Independent“ and in it he wrote: „Who is a Macedonian? Everybody born in Macedonia. But by this term "Macedonian, only the geographical origin of the people is meant. In Macedonia... live different nationalities, ethnic groups: Bulgarians, Greeks, Turks, Aromani, Albanians, Jews, etc. All these people are Mace-



donians, because they were born in Macedonia... We call the various ethnic groups by their real names: Greeks, Albanians, Turks, and others, but we call ourselves Bulgarian. This is how everyone else referred to us“. About the language spoken by the population, L. Dimitrov wrote that „there is no specific „Macedonian language“, there is only a Macedonian dialect of the Bulgarian language“ (Dimitrov, 1944). In 1945, the member of the Central Committee of the Macedonian Patriotic Organization (MPO) Hristo Anastasov published a coloured ethnographic map of Macedonia, in which the population of Mala Prespa was indicated as Bulgarian, and the population in Gollobordë and Poletë as mixed Bulgarian-Albanian (Anastasoff, 1945).

Yugoslavia did not agree with such a vision and because of this, they persecuted the ideas of the Macedonian Liberation Movement and their representatives on their territory, as well as abroad. The first official emissary of the Macedonism in Albania was Nikola Berovski from Bitola. He was sent in November of 1944 by Yugoslavia to Mala Prespa, within the framework of cooperation that Belgrade and Tirana had at the time in the area of education. By the end of the year, Yugoslavia sent two more emissaries. In this period, however, they only pushed the propaganda of a Macedonian language different from the Bulgarian, without being able to offer instruction in schools. On December 4th, 1944, the first ever experimental lesson on the so called Macedonian language was held in Bitola. At the time, there was not even a grammar text in this new language. It was not until May 3rd, 1945, when the third consecutive language committee in Skopje conclusively accepted the so called Macedonian alphabet, and on June 7th, its orthography was codified.

Later, in Bitola and Resen, preparatory seminars were organized that took place over the period of 2 weeks. In the fall of 1945, for the start of the school year, 10 teachers of the so-called Macedonian language were sent from Yugoslavia, who were assigned to all the villages in Mala Prespa except for Leska and Dolna Gorica. The children of these two villages were assigned to go to school in Pustec and Glombochani. For the first time, then, education using the Skopjan literary norm began in Albania. The Macedonian teachers, who were sent, were not properly educated for the task, some of them had only finished third grade. Difficulties began to surface, as „the translation was amateurish, because the teachers did not have enough knowledge either in Macedonian, or in Albanian“ (Todoroska, 2014).



*A commemorative tablet in Bitola on the building in which the first lesson in the so called Macedonian language was held on December, 4th 1944, for the first time.*

The way the Macedonian teachers were sent is also interesting. According to the memoirs of the former partisan Iliya Dumovski, who had settled in the Resen district, was called to surrender his weapon and to start „fighting with a pen „. He was sent on a seminar for teachers in Resen where he was issued a certificate, in which was written that he was being appointed as a teacher and the document issued for this purpose must be delivered to the village council in the village of Tuminec. Such a manner of appointing teachers shows that lasting connections, that circumvented Albanian authorities, had been formed between communist Yugoslavia and the local communist authorities in Mala Prespa.

In the fall of 1946, the number of Macedonian teachers increased by 10. The Skopjan literary norm started being taught in the villages of Vorbnica in Gollobordë, Karchishta in Poletto, and in Vrabnik. There were attempts to open a Macedonian schools in the village of Lin, but due to the small number of children, who spoke the local Bulgarian dialect, the

Yugoslav teacher, after a two-month stay, was transferred to the village of Cerje in Mala Prespa. Education in the so called Macedonian language was taught from first through fourth grades and after that, the subjects were taught entirely in Albanian.

From the Yugoslav side, the Macedonian teachers were temporarily tasked to also organize literacy courses for adults, and to open bookshops with Macedonian publications. They had to send written reports about their work to the highest authorities in Yugoslavia. This turned these teachers into true emissaries of Macedonism, and Belgrade strived to keep them on Albanian territory for as long as possible. This conclusion can be made by the fact that, at first, the teachers did not receive salaries during their summer vacations and had to go back to their country of origin. But in 1946, the district committee on the League of Communists in Macedonia (LCM) in Bitola made the decision to pay the salaries of the Macedonian teachers for July and August and in this way, they would remain in Albania.

The teachers sent by Yugoslavia for instruction in the so called Macedonian language relied on the few local intellectuals for their work, who, before 1939, worked for Serbian interests. This is the case of Boris Malle from the village of Glombochani, who, after 1944, was responsible for education in Mala Prespa. According to the research of Maria Taushanska, as early as 1927, when B. Malle began his studies in the college of Korçë, he made close contacts with the local Yugoslav consulate and especially with the person in charge of the cultural affairs, who gave him Yugoslav primers (Taushanska, 2019).

The central authorities in Tirana were not aware of what was happening in Mala Prespa. At the beginning of 1945, the Yugoslav teacher in the so called Macedonian language were summoned to a meeting with their Albanian counterparts in Tirana. At this meeting, Enver Hoxha was also present, who up to this moment „did not know that there was in Macedonian language instruction in Albania“. The Albanian communist leader shrugged his shoulders in surprise, but calmed down when they told him that, in the People's Republic of Macedonia, there were Albanian teachers (Glikorovski, 2007). In the period that followed, the reciprocal approach would play a significant role in the fate of the people of Bulgarian descent in Albania, as well as of the Albanians in Yugoslavia.

In order to learn details about Yugoslav activity on Albanian territory, the Albanian government sent an official inquiry through its delegation in

Belgrade, to which the Macedonian Minister of Education Ljuben Lape responded on April 18th, 1946, with „up until now, our Ministry has only sent textbooks to the Macedonian schools in Albania. They were sent via the district people’s council in the cities of Bitola and Debar, because this is the easiest way. Our Ministry has also published: a Macedonian grammar, spelling-book for 2nd grade, an appendix for the primer and various collections of children’s stories and poetry. These will also be sent to the Macedonian schools in Albania“ (Todoroska, 2014). From this document, it is evident that the Macedonian textbooks were distributed without the knowledge of the Albanian state, and their very importation was not done through official channels, and the contents of the textbooks conformed to the Yugoslav education system.

The act from the Yugoslav side to instill Macedonism among the Bulgarians in Albania is only one of the elements for completely binding Tirana to Belgrade. At the second plenum of the Central Committee of the Albanian Labour Party (ALP) that took place in November of 1944, another attempt to depose Enver Hoxha and establish even larger Yugoslav control under the influence of the League of the Communists in Yugoslavia was made. On January 10th, 1945, J. V. Stalin informed Georgi Dimitrov that „the Yugoslavs want to capture Greek Macedonia. They also want Albania and even parts of Hungary and Austria“ (Tsanev, 2009). The USSR gradually accepted the Yugoslav position. On January 9th, 1948, during the visit of the Yugoslav Minister Milovan Đilas in Moscow, Stalin announced to him that „we (the USSR, Ed.) have no particular interests in Albania. We agree for Yugoslavia to unite with Albania and the sooner this happens, the better“ (Kruglov, 2011).

The Albanian Constitution, adopted in March, 1946, was an actual copy of the Constitution of Yugoslavia. In order to implement the planned unification between Yugoslavia and Albania, only in the period 1946 – 1947, 27 bilateral agreements were signed Reinstating the Border Exchange of Merchandise between Yugoslavia and Albania, the Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Help, the Treaty for Coordination of the Economic Plans, the Treaty of Customs Union and Standardization of the currency, and others. (Pavlovec, 2008). Some Yugoslav politicians began viewing Albania as a future seventh republic of Yugoslavia. The significance of the Convention for Cultural Cooperation between the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the People’s Republic of Albania, signed on July 9th, 1947, is especially big. Its article 4 envisioned aiding the exchange

of researchers, teachers, instructors, educationists, etc. This is also the legal foundation that legitimized the activities of the Yugoslav teachers, who taught Macedonian. In practice, after communist power was established in Albania, a huge number of Yugoslav „specialists“ were sent to participate in all economic and political affairs. Especially important is the fact that a great number of Yugoslav military in the form of counsellors were staying on the territory of Albania and participated in the formation of its armed forces and the special service.

Bit by bit, the leadership of Albania started to realize how dependent on Yugoslavia they were. In 1947, the willingness of the patriotic circles in Albania to free themselves from Yugoslav influence became more and more visible. This aspiration for self-dependence, however, was persecuted by the Albanian special services, who were dominated by Yugoslav specialists appointed to defend positions there. The repressions reached the upper political circles in the country, when in 1947, 9 members of the Albanian National Assembly were arrested for anti-Yugoslav propaganda. Yugoslav aspirations were at their peak, when during the February Plenum of the Central Committee of the ACP in 1948 with the active participation of the Yugoslav representatives, another attempt to depose Enver Hoxha was made.

However, on June 28th, 1948, the Informbureau adopted a resolution in which the leadership of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia was harshly condemned for displays of nationalism and revisionism. This set in motion the rupture in the relations of Belgrade with other countries ruled by communist parties. Albania responded quickly to this twist. On June 29th, in Tirana, a decision was made, according to which the Yugoslav specialists were obliged to leave Albania in a matter of 48 hours. Immediately after this, the Albanian Minister of the Interior Koçi Xoxe, who was the most active conduit for the influence of the Yugoslav Communist Party and a supporter of the idea of the incorporation of Albania into the Yugoslav Federation, was stripped of his post, expelled from the Political Bureau and was delivered to the court to be tried. The information was published, that of 31 members in total in the Central Committee of the Albanian Labour Party, 14 were perpetrating acts in favour of Yugoslavia and they were repressed. The purge also affected the Albanian National Assembly – 32 out of the 109 members of the assembly were charged with pro-Yugoslav activities.

Combatting the Yugoslav influence in Albania also encompassed the educational system. On July 2nd, 1948, the Ministry of the Interior in Ti-

rana issued an order for all textbooks in which J. B. Tito is mentioned to be confiscated from all schools in Albania. This measure also affected the Macedonian schools in Albania, in which educational instruction was carried out with Yugoslav textbooks. The actions of the Albanian government stopped the growth of the network of Macedonian schools under Yugoslav control. For example, the opening of a Macedonian school in the village of Trebishte in Gollobordë was prevented, the decision for which was made by the Ministry of National Education of PR of Macedonia on June 22nd, 1948. Even at the beginning of 1949, Yugoslavia made attempts to send teachers of the so called Macedonian language to Albania, but they were not allowed to enter by the Albanian authorities. At the same time, immediately after June 28th, 1948, the Yugoslav teachers were taken into custody and later expelled from Albania in August of the same year. The only Yugoslav teachers who remained on Albanian territory after June, 1948, were Nikola Berovski and Georgi Malevski, because they were married to Albanian women.

The available statistical data shows that throughout the period 1944 – 1948, the policy of Macedonisation was conducted most intensely. This was due to the strong, unhindered pressure applied by Yugoslavia and the presence of Yugoslav „specialists“ and „counsellors“ in great numbers on Albanian territory. In the census taken in 1945, 14,400 people of Bulgarian descent were registered as Macedonians, which amounts to 1.28% of the entire population of the country (Appendices, table 13). The process of Macedonisation in this period encompassed the Bulgarian Christians in the region of Mala Prespa, the village of Vrabnik, and the regions of Poletë and Gollobordë. Some of the Bulgarian Muslims in Gollobordë were also subjected to Macedonisation.

### **3.3. Factors and actions for preserving the Bulgarian identity under the conditions of the Enver Hoxha dictatorship**

After June 28th, 1948, a differentiated approach of the authorities in Tirana towards the Albanian residents of Bulgarian descent is observed. Several different stages can be defined, and the way the people were treated was affected by complex and conflicting regional and international relationships, the activities of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance,



the Warsaw Pact, NATO, and other important international factors and the position of the Albanian authorities towards them. However, for the entire period from 1948 to 1991 one important feature can be observed – the Albanian government's view of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as a country, in which the Serbian nationalism and social imperialism ruled. For this reason, despite the fact that Enver Hoxha never abandoned the Comintern's Macedonism, he wanted to limit the influence of Yugoslavia over the people, who were registered as Macedonians. As result of this policy, the Macedonism in Albania was not formed on an anti-Bulgarian basis, which is a distinctive feature of the Yugoslav Macedonism.

The expulsion of the Yugoslav teachers in 1948 led to important changes in the spiritual and cultural life of the Christians of Bulgarian descent in Mala Prespa. For example, the priest in the village of Shulin started giving sermons in the church „neither in Macedonian, nor in Albanian or Greek, but in Old Slavonic<sup>29</sup>“ (Stefanija, 1980). Most The changes in the educational system were significant. Instruction in the Macedonian language was suspended in Gollobordë and Polet and only Albanian was studied in the local schools. Also, in the region of Kukës Gora, only the Albanian language was studied. In the same period, in Mala Prespa and the village of Vrabnik, the Macedonian schools continued to exist, but without teachers using the Skopjan literary norm. Under these conditions, for the new school year of 1948-1949, Georgi Malevski started translating Albanian textbooks into the local Prespa Bulgarian dialect, by using the Albanian Roman alphabet and made copies of the lessons on a mimeograph.

According to various memoir sources, during the period immediately after 1948, Enver Hoxha continued to believe this population was Bulgarian. M. Ognyanov wrote in his memoirs that „both Enver and Nexhmije thought of us as Bulgarians... Up until 1960, without opposing the Comintern's proposition, Enver did not put any pressure on our fellow countrymen in Albania to Macedonise“. Also interesting is the fact that during his visit to Bulgaria in December of 1947, Enver Hoxha included in the

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<sup>29</sup> In this case, the actual Old Slavonic language is not meant, but rather Church Slavonic – that is a Russian version of the Old Bulgarian language. In the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, divine services were conducted in Church Slavonic until the 1970s. After that, most of the liturgy and the sermons were translated and adapted into to modern Bulgarian. The service books in the church in the village of Shulin were donated by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, through the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana, in the 1930s.

Albanian delegation „the Deputy Minister of the Defence, General Kristo Temelko, obviously as a Bulgarian“. In his memoirs, M. Ognyanov wrote that during their meeting in Sofia, K. Temelko informed him that the Albanian government was officially requesting from the Bulgarian authorities that they send teachers of Bulgarian and „Enver Hoxha (personally) asked for Bulgarian teachers for the Bulgarian villages“ (Ognyanov, 2002). According to S. Stanev, the initiative for such a request originated among the residents of the villages in Mala Prespa, who sent a letter to E. Hoxha, in which they ask for Bulgarian teachers (Stanev, 2016). It is possible that the initiator of this idea was K. Temelko himself, who was the only member of the ACP who understood the essence of the Bulgarian-Yugoslav conflict in detail. These steps, taken by the Albanian government, albeit formally prompted by the understanding of E. Hoxha that this population was Bulgarian, were aimed at decreasing Yugoslav influence in Albania.

In this period, however, Bulgaria could not fulfill such a request, as the country was also subjected to a heavy Yugoslav pressure and in Pirin Macedonia, Yugoslav teachers and booksellers were also active. Settling the question of sending Bulgarian teachers to Albania became possible only after a resolution by the Informbiro was adopted at the end of June, 1948, and the measures undertaken on the Bulgarian side were based on decisions made by the party and not by the government. On November 29th, 1948, the Albanian proposition was discussed at a meeting of the Secretariat of the Bulgarian Communist Party, during which Traycho Kostov, Valko Chervenkov, and Georgi Chankov were present. In article 5 of the adopted resolution, it is written that „it is to be agreed that the proposition of the Albanian government for sending 9 people, Bulgarian teachers, to Albania to teach the Bulgarian language“ (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 1, i. 8, a.u. 82).

In this period, however, Traycho Kostov was already in conflict with J. V. Stalin, and on March 27th, 1949, at the plenum of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, he was accused of anti-Soviet activity. This political conjuncture turned out to be decisive for not implementing the adopted resolution. In his memoirs, M. Ognyanov states that „Georgi Dimitrov referred the matter (of sending of Bulgarian teachers in Albania, Ed.) to Anton Yugov... He told them that regarding this matter, they should turn to Skopje“. In this way, Bulgaria missed an historical opportunity to officially introduce the Bulgarian literary language into the schools in Albania for population of Bulgarian descent.

In August of 1949, the Greek Civil War ended with the defeat of the partisans. Many refugees, among whom there were also people of Bulgarian descent, fled Greece and settled in Albania and Bulgaria. In this period, the Greek Communist Party, despite that it also had not abandoned Macedonism, decided to limit the Yugoslav influence, and for this reason, the Skopjan alphabet and the Macedonian language, which is full with Serbian loan-words, were taken out of use. Books in the local regional language form, based on the Bulgarian Kostur-Lerin dialects, began being published using the Bulgarian alphabet.<sup>30</sup> The Greek refugees of Bulgarian descent, that fled to Albania, carried this literary norm with them, which was learned easily by the local population of Bulgarian descent in Albania. The Kostur-Lerin dialects of Greece and Prespa dialect of Albania and Greece are similar. It was the Prespa dialect that began to be used as a language of instruction in Albania. The first primer written in, it used the Bulgarian alphabet, was printed as a limited edition on a mimeograph in 1952.

In this period, a second census was taken during the rule of the Albanian Labour Party. Characteristic of it, due to the rapidly aggravating relations between Albania and Yugoslavia in 1948, the process of Macedonisation in Mala Prespa and the village of Vrabnik was significantly toned down, and in Gollobordë and Poletë it was completely put to an end. The data in table 13 shows that during the census of 1950, only 2,273 people or 0.19% of the entire population of Albania was registered as Macedonian. In the 5-year period between this census and the previous one, no significant change in demographic processes in Albania is observed. The average household size increased slightly from 5.7 to 5.76, and the total increase of the population was 8.6%. At the same time, a rapid decrease in the group of people registered as Macedonians is observed: 84.22% compared to 1945. This categorically shows that the decision to indicate these people as Macedonian was political, and filling the data in the column of the census form

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<sup>30</sup> This regional language form was created by Atanas Peykov from the village of Babchor, in the region of Kostur. In 1947, he became an editor of translations at the Information Bureau of GCP „Hellas press“. In 1951, he left for Bucharest and worked at the Macedonian Department of the „Nea Ellada“ Publishing House at the Central Committee of the Greek Communist Party. He edited the Macedonian page of the Greek emigrants' newspaper „Nea Zoi“. In 1952, he wrote his „Grammar of the Macedonian language“, based on the dialects of Southwestern Macedonia (the regions of Lerin, Kostur, Voden) using the Bulgarian alphabet. Numerous books, newspapers, and bulletins were published in this literary norm by the emigrants of the Greek Communist Party, in the 1950s.

was done by the administration, without having real opportunities for the people of Bulgarian descent to self-identify as Macedonians.

The primers published in 1952 on a mimeograph using Bulgarian Prespa dialect with Bulgarian alphabet were not enough for the school process in Mala Prespa and the village of Vrabnik. For this reason, on August 13th, 1955, the Albanian Labour Party once again turned to Bulgaria to send them textbooks for „the schools of the Macedonian minority in Albania“ as they were not able to produce such editions (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 1, i. 32, a.u. 442). The official Bulgarian response stated that „Textbooks in Macedonian language are not published in our country, as the children of the Macedonians living in Bulgaria, including in Pirin Macedonia, study from textbooks written in Bulgarian in the schools“. However, Bulgaria, once again, was not sufficiently active on the matter and another chance to introduce the Bulgarian literary language into the schools in Albania in the region, where people of Bulgarian descent lived, was missed.

After the death of Stalin in 1953, a process of a slow improvement of the Soviet-Yugoslav relations began, which also exerted influence on Albanian politics. In June of 1954, Soviet leader N. S. Khrushchev took steps to get closer to J. B. Tito. Regarding this, E. Hoxha wrote that “When the relationship between Moscow and Belgrade is bad, the USSR admits that Albania is right, and when the Soviet-Yugoslav relations are good, Moscow convinces Tirana to moderate its critique of Yugoslavia (Hoxha, 1980). That same year, Albania gave their permission for the restoration of diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia. The differences between the USSR and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia began vanishing very quickly after the Belgrade Declaration was signed in 1955. The Albanian actions for the normalization of Albanian-Yugoslav relations were taken under the immediate influence and the foreign-political initiative of the Soviet government (Smirnova, 2003). The Soviet influence, however, followed the dynamics of the Yugoslav-Soviet relationship.

In 1959, the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, Todor Zhivkov, visited Albania and under the impressions with which he was left, he decided to turn to N. S. Khrushchev with a request for economic assistance [for Albania]. Regarding this T. Zhivkov wrote in his memoirs that „he, [Khrushchov] reacted nervously and harshly. Obviously he was set to lead a war with the Albanian leadership. Back then,

it was difficult for me see what motivated his reaction and it still is. One way or another, despite proclaiming internationalism, Khrushchev did not permit the Albanian people to be helped“ (Zhivkov, 1997).

E. Hoxha gradually realized that because of changes occurring in the Soviet Bloc at the time, Albania would continue to be pressured to get closer to Yugoslavia, and eventually the Skopjan literary norm would be reintroduced for the second time, increasing the opportunity for Yugoslav influence. For this reason, he decided to support the efforts of the population of Mala Prespa to preserve its traditional language and alphabet. On November 1st, 1955, the Ministry of Education of Albania tasked Boris Malle to prepare textbooks for the local Macedonian schools, and he was given a deadline to complete the task before January 15th, 1956. Education in the local Bulgarian dialect, written according to the rules of Bulgarian spelling, was approved by the Ministry of Education in Albania and in 1956, spelling-books, arithmetic books and other textbooks were published (Appendices, facsimile 13).

Despite the fact that the language used in the schools in Mala Prespa was declared as „Macedonian,“ its appearance did not follow the Skopjan literary norm. The official language of modern day Republic of North Macedonia was created in 1945, using a partial deconstruction of the existing Bulgarian literary language and gradually filling it with dialect words and other loan-words, mostly from Serbian (Kochev, Kocheva, 2018). Unlike it, the written language used in Mala Prespa after 1948 was created by people who were deprived of the opportunity to study the Bulgarian literary norm for about 40 years, but at the same time, they had been having encounters with it. For this reason, this regional language form was based on the local Bulgarian Prespa dialect, written following Bulgarian orthographic rules and using the Bulgarian alphabet and within it, a process of artificially including loan-words is not observed. Lexically speaking, over 98% of its word stock is Bulgarian, in its western dialect form.

The language of the textbooks written by B. Malle was examined by D. Stefanija and according to him „it is neither the Macedonian literary language, nor is it a combination of Macedonian with Prespa dialect with non-Macedonian spelling, but a separate script“ (Stefanija, 1980). In reality, this Yugoslav explanation tried to cover up the fact that within the Albanian educational system, the textbooks used at the time were translated into the local Bulgarian Prespa dialect, with the Skopjan letters **ќ, ђ, љ,**

Ѣ, and ј removed and the characteristic Bulgarian letters ѣ, ѡ, Ѣ, Ю, and я introduced.<sup>31</sup>

In 1956, the newspaper „New Macedonia“ stated that in Albania „nothing new has been invented. The alphabet in which the children in these schools study nowadays is the Bulgarian alphabet“ (Markoski, 1956). According to K. Todoroska, in these „primers that were not at all written using the Macedonian alphabet, one could often find words and phrases that do not come from the Macedonian language“ (Todoroska, 2014).

The official approval of this regional language form, based on the local Bulgarian Prespa dialect, happened only a month before the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union took place, during which the cult status of the personality of Stalin was partially debunked. Later, the ALP was forced take another step during its third congress in 1956, that would draw them closer to Yugoslavia. E. Hoxha, himself, stated from the tribune that mistakes were made on the Albanian side regarding relations between the Albanian and the Yugoslav Communist Parties and the two countries. During this forum, full support for the Belgrade declaration was also expressed.

By using the improved Albanian-Yugoslav relations, the Yugoslavs stated that „now is the time to fix the alphabet“ in Albania and for the Skopjan alphabet, using the so called Macedonian literary language, be reintroduced into the Macedonian schools. This initiative however, was not met with support by the Albanian side and remained unanswered (Markoski, 1956).

During this examined period, relations between Albania and Bulgaria were good, which allowed for the comparatively tolerant attitude of Tirana towards the people of Bulgarian descent, even though self-identifying as a Bulgarian was not officially permitted. During the population censuses in Albania taken in 1955 and 1960, 3,341 and 4,235 people respectively identified as Macedonians. This number did not cover all the people of Bulgarian descent by a long shot. Only the population of Mala Prespa and the village of Vrabnik was registered as Macedonian. The increase in the group of people who identified as Macedonians in 5-year intervals is 46% (in 1955) and 26% (in 1960). In both of the censuses, the share of this population is around 0.25% of the entire population of Albania.

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<sup>31</sup> As examples can be given the words: той (he), мойот (my), първиот (the first), цѣрен (black), цѣрвен (red), бѣрзо (quick), завѣрши (finish), etc.



The situation in Albania became significantly more complicated after the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which took place in October, 1961. E. Hoxha did not agree with the decisions made during it and put a start to a policy of isolation from the Soviet bloc. For this reason, during this period, Albania began viewing Bulgaria as „a base of the Russian social-imperialists against our country and other Balkan states“ (Hoxha, 1980). The Albanian authorities initiated a series of anti-Bulgarian campaigns, but their basis was ideological, and not national. During the 7th Congress of the Albanian Labour Party that took place in November, 1967 E. Hoxha stated: „For the Bulgarian people, we continue to have feelings of friendship. But we are compelled to note that we do not hold a single grain of trust towards the leadership of the party and the Bulgarian state, because it is taking a hostile position against our country... Having the Soviet social-imperialists behind its back, Bulgaria is preparing to take the Dardanelles at an appropriate time and this way to restore the Treaty of San Stefano“ (Hoxha, 1985).

Albania froze its membership in the Warsaw Pact in 1961 and the next year they dropped out of the structures of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, and in 1968, after the intervention of the countries of the Soviet Bloc in Czechoslovakia, conclusively dropped out of the Warsaw Pact. In this period, Yugoslavia was also suspicious of the activities of the Warsaw Pact members in Czechoslovakia, which inspired a new pragmatic incentive for Tirana and Belgrade to come together, despite their ideological differences. In 1970, the Albanian semi-official newspaper „Zëri i popullit“ published an historic balance sheet of the conflicts between the Albanian and the Yugoslav nations during the national liberation struggle led „against common enemies, against the same invaders, and against the same intrigues and plots of the Great Powers“. Especially eloquent was the statement that the Albanian people will come to the aid of the Yugoslav people in case of a foreign invasion. In the article, it is stated that „today between our two countries, despite the change of the government systems, normal relations of good neighbourliness exist, we exchange trade, culture, and all else“ (Zëri i popullit, 1970).

The support Albania expressed for Yugoslavia, despite the existing overt ideological differences, shows that precisely this state of the relations between them satisfied the Albanian state. The analysis of Albanian publications on Yugoslav subjects from this period shows that the approach

of Tirana was heavily politicized, but in it, there was an immutable aspect of defending the interests of the Albanian minority in Yugoslavia. In 1982, E. Hoxha stated that „for the Russian-Bulgarian revisionists, there are two paths of attacking Albania with the aim of gaining our access to the Adriatic Sea. One is through the Vardar and other -Kosovo“ (Hoxha, 1988). Such a concept additionally aided the rapprochement between the Albanian and the Yugoslav positions for covering historic facts with the purpose of decreasing the Bulgarian influence in Macedonia.

This foreign-political course of Albania, after 1961 and especially after 1968, fit in well with Yugoslav interests. Albanian isolationism, hiding behind a disguise of „non-commitment“ and especially the anti-Soviet policy of Albania, was encouraged by Belgrade. The Albanian policy of reciprocity, expressed by the granting of rights to the Macedonians in Albania in exchange for the rights of the Albanians in Yugoslavia, was a well calculated move by Tirana. The argumentation behind it was that Yugoslavia wanted to take care of the Macedonians in Pirin or Aegean Macedonia, and the same way Albania wanted to defend the rights of the Albanians in Yugoslavia. Since Belgrade was highly interested in the presence of Macedonians outside Yugoslavia and for them to be recognized as a separate ethnic group, it accepted the Albanian approach unconditionally. At the same time, the authorities in Belgrade did not pay attention to the irony in the words of E. Hoxha about the Yugoslav „right to raise its voice against „the injustice“ they say was committed by Bulgarians, Greeks or Albanians“ against the Macedonians (Hoxha, 1988). E. Hoxha clearly realized that he was creating an exchange instrument in his relationship with Yugoslavia that did not hold any political value for himself personally, given that the number of people registered as Macedonians in Albania was low and this did not exert substantial influence on the ethnic structure of its population. In practice both countries tried to benefit politically and economically as much as possible.

In this way, Yugoslavia unconditionally accepted the Albanian interpretation of the Macedonian Question that began to take on another form in Tirana. It reached the point in which Albania advertised the „full rights“ of „the Macedonian“ minority on its territory for propaganda purposes, and, at the same time, insisting more and more that the authorities in Macedonia were mercilessly and brutally trampling the rights and liberties of

the numerous Albanian population there. Regarding this ever more solid approach of the Albanian authorities, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Sofia thought that „the Macedonian Question is still not a sufficiently used resource for the Albanian leadership in its relations with Yugoslavia and they will not miss any chance to bring it up even more harshly whenever they see appropriate conditions to do so“.

The temporary and partial overlap of Albanian and the Yugoslav interests can be seen in a number of documents from the beginning of the 1980s. For example, in the program declaration of the Albanian government, as delivered on January 15th, 1982, by Prime Minister Adil Çarçani before the National Assembly, it is stated that „one of the obvious dangers that threaten Yugoslavia is the Soviet-Bulgarian danger. We have stated before the entire world that the Soviets and their vassals the Bulgarians among others, are some of our greatest enemies, and because of this, we have opposed and will oppose their aggressive objectives aimed at us and our neighbours to the very end“.

During this period Albania, expressed its disagreement with articles in the Bulgarian publications „Collection of Military History“ and „Historical Review“, with the book published by Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and titled „Macedonia. Collection of Documents and Materials“, with the reprint A. Selishchev's book „The Slavic Population of Albania“, etc. The Albanian state was especially sensitive to the fact that the region around the city of Korçë was included in the borders of Bulgaria, according to the Preliminary Treaty of San Stefano. In 1983, the provisional head of the Albanian Embassy in Sofia, Shakir Vukaj, described these publications as „anti-Albanian writings“.

This pragmatic warming of relations between Albania and Yugoslavia, observed at the end of the 1960s and during the 1970s heavily influenced the fate of the Albanian residents of Bulgarian descent. According to M. Ognyanov: „However, after he (Enver Hoxha, Ed.) and Nikita Khrushchev grew estranged, he changed his opinion and supported Macedonism... He did not resort to forceful Albanization – it developed spontaneously, and he proclaimed these people as Macedonians. Despite this, in documents of the Albanian Academy of Sciences, the term “Macedonian Bulgarians” was still used, but only in historical research“ (Ognyanov, 2002).

At the same time, the closed nature of the Albanian state made it impossible for a direct Yugoslav influence in the regions with population of

Bulgarian descent. Despite the formal improvement of Albanian-Yugoslav relations, Albanian „state security monitored everyone, who said even one good word about Yugoslavia. They investigated and arrested them. After this, they exiled them to distant and undeveloped regions. Those who cared for our land in friendship (Yugoslavia, Ed.) were proclaimed Yugoslav agents. A single foreign newspaper does not arrive in Albania“ (Peshevska, 1990). The Albanian state limited Yugoslav influence by also using various technological means. For example, the radio transmitter in Korçë broadcasted on two wavelengths that were very close to the frequencies of Radio Skopje, thus jamming its emissions. As result of this, the population in Mala Prespa had no chance to be exposed to the Yugoslav Macedonist influence.

In the 1960s and the 1970s, in Gollobordë and Kukës, a specific ethno-cultural situation Gora was observed. The Albanian authorities officially promoted the idea that the population living there is bilingual. Despite that, in most of the villages in both regions, the adults understood both Bulgarian and Albanian, in no case can equal usage of the two languages by the population of these regions can be observed. The mother tongue of the people born in Gollobordë and Kukës Gora is Bulgarian in its respective dialect forms, and the children start to learn Albanian when they start going to school at the age of six. In this period and after it, there were still people, mostly women, who did not understand Albanian due to the fact that they have not attended Albanian schools. When conducting research on various topics, especially folklore and ethnography, the representatives of the Albanian institutions write down the local Bulgarian speech with Albanian letters (Belo, 2004) (Appendices, facsimile 14). At the same time, in the border areas of Gollobordë, in the contact zone between the Bulgarian and the Albanian languages, some of the population truly became bilingual, but this process was in effect for a relatively short period, after which the Albanian replaced the Bulgarian. Such is the case in the villages Sebishta and Smolnik in Gollobordë. For example, in the statistics of the Secret Service at the Ministry of Interior of Albania from May, 1935, the village of Smolnik was registered as Bulgarian speaking. It went through the bilingual period as early as the 1960s, when the Albanian language started to replace the Bulgarian, and after the 1980s, there were no longer native people whose mother tongue was Bulgarian. Later, the Drina River turned out to be a relatively stable language borderline in the region of Gollobordë. It is of interest

that in the 1960s and the 1970s, the families in Mala Prespa, who had relatives abroad, who were members of the Macedonian-Bulgarian organization MPO [Macedonian Patriotic Organization], kept in touch with them (Macedonian Tribune, 1977). In this period, in the schools in Mala Prespa and the village of Vrabnik continued the use of the Bulgarian Prespa dialect, written in the Bulgarian alphabet. Using this policy, Albania strived not to allow new Yugoslav influence. In 1965, all Albanian textbooks necessary for the education in the primary schools were translated into this regional language form by Sterjo Spasse and Nikola Berovski. During the period, up until 1979, in addition to the necessary textbooks, extra-mural reading materials in the Bulgarian Prespa dialect, written in the Bulgarian alphabet, were also published, such as an anthology of Albanian literature, a children's collection „The Young Eagle“, the poem „Mother Albania“ and others. These publications were sold in a small bookshop in the village of Pustec (Peshenska, 1991). The aforementioned textbooks and handbooks were used in the schools in Mala Prespa until the fall of the communist regime in 1991.

The biography of Sterjo Spasse from the village of Glombochani, author or co-author of most of the textbooks and handbooks in Albania, published in the Bulgarian Prespa dialect, using the Bulgarian alphabet, is interesting. Before the Albanian Communist Party came to power in 1944, he lived in Tirana, having as a roommate Nikola Pandovski from the village of Vrabnik – a notable local Bulgarian, the main initiator and one of the people who signed the petition sent to Tsaritsa Giovanna in 1939 for granting church-school rights to the Bulgarians in Albania. In the following period, S. Spasse strengthened his position as one of the notable translators from Bulgarian to Albanian. He translated the works of Elin Pelin, Y. Yovkov, I. Vazov, P. Yavorov and others.

In 1947, S. Spasse attended the Balkan Authors Congress in Sofia, and in January, 1957, he published an article in „Zëri i Popullit“ on the topic of Albanian-Bulgarian friendship. In the bio-bibliographical index of the „Sts. Cyril and Methodius“ National Library, S. Spasse is indicated as a foreign writer using the Bulgarian language (Dyugmedzhieva, Ivanov, 1973). An inquiry by the Bulgarian Embassy in Tirana from 1979 notes that „he speaks a „Macedonian“ language that almost does not differ from the literary Bulgarian language“. M. Ognyanov describes him as a translator from Bulgarian „without a dictionary – basing it on his own Prespa dialect“ (Ognyanov, 2002).

During the communist era in Albania, S. Spasse conformed to the party requirements and followed the official line of support for Macedonism. He even became the deputy-president of the association „Albania – China“. The influence of the political conjuncture can be found in another document of the Bulgarian Embassy in Tirana from the same period, in which it is stated that he is a „novelist and translator of Bulgarian literature, (but) at present, he does not translate“. Later on, it is stated that he has merits in relation to Bulgarian literature, but „given the current unfavourable course of the Albanian leadership for the Bulgarian cultural initiatives“, he would not accept a Bulgarian medal.

Regarding his death in 1989, the Bulgarian writer and journalist Natasha Manolova published the memoirs of her visit to Albania the year before and her meeting with S. Spasse, in the newspaper „Literary front“. She wrote: „I knew that he was a friend of Bulgaria and he had translated the works of Vazov, Yovkov, Elin Pelin, Georgi Karaslavov and other into Albanian back in the 1950s and the 1960s ... with Sterjo Spasse, we understand each other excellently in Bulgarian. Our cheerful companion and translator dr. Nikoli did not have to do anything for one whole evening“. (Manolova, 1989). In her article, she also shared that S. Spasse was very well acquainted with the Bulgarian national question.

Based on his personal impression and the available information about S. Spasse, M. Ognyanov reckons that cases like this „deserve a special analysis that would be instructive for Bulgarian national policy“.

With Tirana and Bulgaria, as a member of the Warsaw Pact, being on bad terms for the period starting from the 1960s until the end of the 1980s and because of the fear of possible military intervention in the country, the Albanian authorities were very sensitive towards the presence of Bulgarians in these regions that were part of Bulgaria according to the Treaty of San Stefano and most of all, in the region of Korçë. For this reason, under the pretence of the needs of the country for industrialization, a resettlement of a part of the population of Bulgarian descent began. They were transferred to the large Albanian cities like Tirana, Elbasan, Durrës (Drach) and others. This process was especially active in the Korçë villages of Drenovo and Boboshtica in the 1960s. In place of the resettled people of Bulgarian descent miners were sent, most of whom were ethnic Aromanians (Vlachs).

In the 1960s and the 1970s, the population of Bulgarian descent in Poletto also rapidly decreased. The confiscation of the private property and



the creation of collective farms made their standard of life worse. At the same time, these collective farms attracted Albanian settlers, which altered the ethnography of Poletë even further.

Mass migrations were also observed among the population of the same descent in Gollobordë. One of the primary means of livelihood in this region is construction and the migrants from there were used as construction workers for important national projects. For their residential accommodations after the migration, they were also tasked with building several residential buildings in the new neighbourhoods of Barbu and Allias in Tirana, in which they were densely accommodated. For this reason, despite the fact that they were cut off from their historic lands, during this period, the Bulgarian language was preserved on the domestic level in everyday communication, and the children born into these families also have Bulgarian language as their mother tongue.

In this period, the migration of the people from Kukës Gora affected a relatively small number of people and they were resettled nearby. The reasons for the migration are primarily for employment and, as in most of the cases, the migratory movements are daily or weekly. The people of Bulgarian descent outside of Gora worked primarily in the district center of Kukës, but a relatively small number of them settled permanently in the city. The number of those who migrated from Kukës Gora to Tirana or Durrës (Drach) was even smaller.

After the population of Mala Prespa was registered as Macedonian, it can be said to a certain degree of accuracy, that the Albanian authorities aimed to encapsulate it. In table 14, the changes in the number of the population in the various village in Mala Prespa for the period 1945 – 1989 (Appendices, table 14) can be followed. Over the span of 44 years, the increase of the population in the region was 67.2%. This was significantly smaller than the total increase of the population of Albania for the same period, which was 183.6%. Also, taking migration processes into account, during the period starting with the 1960s until the end of the 1980s of the past century, around 10% of the population left the region, we can observe that the natural increase of the population of Mala Prespa is higher than 67.2%, but far less than the total for the country.

The majority of the population, which had migrated, settled in the nearby district center Korçë, and a minority moved to Tirana or other large Albanian cities.

Before 1983, there were 9 primary schools, 2 junior high schools, and 2 high schools in Mala Prespa, the latter two in Pustec and Dolna Gorica. Because of the decrease in the population of those of student age, in that same year, the high school in Dolna Gorica was closed.

A characteristic feature of the newly formed migrant communities of people of Bulgarian descent in Albania during this period is that these communities were formed based on the regions from which the people came and the communication within them was primarily with people of their region. Despite the fact that the Bulgarian dialects they spoke are relatively close to each other, it was relatively rare for people to have contacts with others who migrated at the same time, but from a different of Albania also inhabited by people Bulgarian descent: Gora, Poletto, Gollobordë, and Mala Prespa. This shows that before 1991, the communities of the people of Bulgarian descent in Albania were not consolidated on a national level, but rather, were regionally fragmented. Having in mind the closed nature of Albania during the period between the 1960s and the 1980s, this lack of consolidation made the process of seeking their ethnic identity really difficult. At the same time, the preservation of the solidity of the large territorial communities of people of Bulgarian descent led to continuity across the generations and the passing on of a number of ethnically determinative characteristics such as mother tongue, family memory, folklore, and others, which made the course of assimilation processes more difficult. However, those people of Bulgarian descent who migrated from the inner parts of the country, namely Drenovo, Boboshtica, and Poletto and those who went through a process of bilingualism in the Bulgarian-Albanian language contact zone in Gollobordë, turned out to be the most vulnerable.

After 1961, Bulgaria had little opportunity to influence the processes affecting the people of Bulgarian descent living in Albania (mostly via the programs of Radio Sofia and Radio Blagoevgrad, whose signals were stronger). Officially, the adopted policy of national nihilism was the main reason for not undertaking any initiative in this direction. The available documents show that in this period, the leadership of Bulgaria was aware of the existence of Bulgarians in Albania. Beside this, during their training, Bulgarian diplomats also got acquainted with some of the information, related to these problems during the period before World War II. For this reason, the archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations, containing documents from the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana,

was examined in 1955, 1957, and 1985 (Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 176, i. 5, s. 663). The existence of Bulgarians in Albania was well known and was registered in documents of Bulgarian diplomats, created during the period after 1961. In a report of an official from the Bulgarian embassy in Tirana about a visit to the region of Korçë in December of 1977, it is stated: „not far from Korçë, we saw a fingerpost pointing to the “Georgi Dimitrov” Collective Farm. We were not aware of this farm up until now. Having in mind that a population of Bulgarian descent also lives in this region, it is not impossible that the name of the farm was chosen in consideration of this fact“. In a report from another official trip in 1980, again to the region of Korçë, it is stated: „The officials call the people of this region Macedonians. They speak a dialect close to our language and the local Albanians of the village market know them as Bulgarians“.

The documents show that, in parallel to the decline in the Bulgarian-Albanian relations, the Bulgarian side, instead of using the presence of people of Bulgarian descent as an instrument in its policy, was rather willing to compromise on the matter. This became especially clear when tensions between Bulgaria and Albania rose after the decision of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party from 1977 concerning the preparations for the celebration of 1,300th anniversary of the establishment of the Bulgarian state. Albania perceived „some chauvinistic elements“ in the Bulgarian preparation for the festivities. In order to appease Albanian worries, on December 12th, 1979, with the initiative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a meeting was conducted in Sofia with the provisional head of the Albanian Embassy, Shakir Vukaj. During the discussion, the Bulgarian diplomats said that „Comrade Zhivkov has stated more than once with authority, that our country has no territorial or minority claims on its neighbouring states. The People’s Republic of Bulgaria has no claims on Albania, as well“.

The Chairman of the State Council of Bulgaria and Secretary-General of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party Todor Zhivkov, however, was not well regarded by E. Hoxha. In 1959, at the time of his visit to Albania, E. Hoxha made an attempt to win Bulgaria over for common actions against Yugoslavia. In his memoirs, T. Zhivkov wrote that „from the start, Enver Hoxha and the entire leadership clearly tried to attach an anti-Tito character to it (the visit, Ed.). In the speeches during the meetings, I was forced to say openly and categorically to Enver Hoxha

in person, “that I was resolute that I did not want him to treat my visit this way, to turn it into propaganda against whichever country“ (Zhivkov, 1997). From this statement, E. Hoxha made the conclusion that, despite the identical problems of the suppression of the rights of both Albanians and Bulgarians in Yugoslavia, the leadership of Bulgaria could not be counted on at that time. E. Hoxha described the attitude of T. Zhivkov in the following way: „Zhivkov adopted the tactical methods of Khrushchev for relations with communist and labour parties: Today he speaks against Tito, tomorrow he supports him, today he opens the borders for gatherings with the Yugoslavs, tomorrow he closes them, today he speaks about Macedonia, tomorrow he disregards it in silence“ (Hoxha, 1980).

Due to this reason, Albanian policy towards Bulgaria remained uninfluenced by the official Bulgarian position. In the following period, albeit less intensively, the ideological campaigns in the media against the Bulgarian Communist Party and its leaders continued. Also, the Albanian authorities did not permit Albanian citizens to join activities organized by the Bulgarian Embassy in Tirana. Our diplomatic mission informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about this on March 6th, 1982, noting that „there were no joint activities with Bulgarians living in Albania because... the local authorities did not allow them to visit the embassy“. In the same period, security officers constantly surveilled the Bulgarian diplomats during their stay in Albania, which made contacts with the local Bulgarians impossible.

The existing tensions in Bulgarian-Albanian relations was discussed on June 21st, 1983, by the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party. They concluded that the Albanian concerns were „baseless“. Later on, in the document, it is stated that „the matter is more relevant to the conclusion of the existence of a Bulgarian population in the past on the territory of modern day Albania“. The political perception throughout this period of the presence of Bulgarians in Albania in the past, but not at present, turns out to be decisive when forming and conducting the Bulgarian state policy towards Tirana up until the end of the 1980s, and the consequences were exceptionally disadvantageous for Bulgarian national interests.

The events in Kosovo in 1981 accelerated the outcome of the complex relations between Albania, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria throughout this and the following period. Bit by bit, the Yugoslav authorities realized that the policy of „reciprocity“ with Albania that they had tolerated, had not brought any benefits for Belgrade. While the direct contacts of Tirana with

the Albanians in Kosovo, the Socialist Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro, led to the increase of its political influence and gave an additional thrust to the Albanian aspirations for even greater self-dependence, but at the same time, the Yugoslav authorities did not manage to establish contacts with the people registered as Macedonians in Albania. At this moment, the official number of people in this category was not even known in Belgrade and Skopje, as the Albanian statistics did not publish information on this matter. In 1974, the Yugoslav researcher Hristo Andonovski wrote: „The number of the Macedonians who live today within the state borders of Albania is difficult to determine. According to some sources, around 60,000 Macedonians live on the territory of Albania today. Because of the ups and downs in the relationship with the neighbouring countries and co-operation with them, ...the information about the minority rights that the Macedonians have as a minority in our neighbour Albania, is contradictory „, (Andonovski, 1974). However, the statement of E. Hoxha before the 7th congress of the ALP, according to which only in „some co-operative farms in Albania... is there a Macedonian population that benefits from all rights granted in accordance with the Constitution of the People's Republic of Albania“, led to a re-evaluation of Yugoslav policy (Hoxha, 1985).

In reality, the „reciprocity“ of Albanian-Yugoslav relations had no balance to it at all. While before 1981, the number of the Albanian population in Yugoslavia reached 1.73 million, which amounts to 7.7% of the entire population, the number of the people registered as Macedonians in Albania in 1979 was 4,097 which amounts to 0.16% of the entire population of the country. At the time the censuses were taken, during the period of Albania's international isolation, the number of people who were registered as Macedonians, wobbled at around 4,500 people, which is about 0.15% of the population of the country. While in 1972 E. Hoxha managed to force the creation of a uniform Albanian literary language based on the Tosk dialect, the attempts of the Yugoslavs to create a Kosovan language, analogically to the so called Macedonian, fell through. Some of the people of Bulgarian descent in Albania, despite being registered as Macedonians, rejected the Skopjan literary norm and were taught in their regional language based on the Bulgarian Prespa dialect, written using the Bulgarian alphabet. This was recognised in the fall of 1980, when after returning from his visit to Tirana, the chairman of the Executive Council of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, Blagoj Popov, stated that „the official policy of

Albania for the Macedonians is not to affirm anything as Macedonian“ (Nin, 1981).

Albania had no interest in disrupting their existing relations with Yugoslavia, because they wanted to keep up their contacts with the Albanian population residing there. For this reason, on March 27th, 1983, the Albanian media published a special telegram of thanks by Enver Hoxha, which was sent to the Macedonian teacher Nikola Berovski. The reason for it was Berovski's translation of E. Hoxha's book „The Anglo-American Imperialists and Albania” into the so called Macedonian language. In the diplomatic circles in Tirana, this act was perceived as another official confirmation by the Albanian authorities of the existence of a Macedonian minority as a courtesy to Yugoslavia. In relation to this, representatives of the Chinese, French, and Greek embassies in Tirana held a discussion on March 29th, with Bulgarian diplomats and were curious as to what the eventual Bulgarian reaction would be. The position of French diplomat Jean Bouyal, according to whom „these are Bulgarians, not Macedonians, as some are trying to prove”, is especially interesting. His opinion is that “Macedonians in Albania cannot be spoken of,„. The Bulgarian diplomatic response, however, was consistent entirely with the official policy of national nihilism. A representative of the Bulgarian diplomatic mission in Tirana responded with „Our country has not raised the question of a Bulgarian minority in Albania, which is consistent with our foreign policy“.

Perhaps the most accurate conclusion arising from these events was stated by Chinese diplomat Li Fangping. According to him, even if the telegram sent by E. Hoxha was considered as extending a hand to Yugoslavia, Albanian-Yugoslav relations are so bad that nothing is able to improve them“.

The conclusion came really quickly indeed. In the middle of July of 1983, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed the department of „Foreign Policy and International Relations“ at the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party of E. Hoxha's book „The Titoites“, published in Tirana. Its appearance was perceived as a clear signal that relations between Albania and Yugoslavia „now seem much more complicated than during the period after 1948“.

In this escalation of tensions in Albanian-Yugoslav relations, E. Hoxha became aware that historical truth was his ally, and because of this, once again, he changed his attitude towards Bulgaria. In his book, he wrote that „in the past, when the Albanian people were fighting against the Ser-



bian claims and terrors, we were friends with the Bulgarian people, we loved each other, we respected each other and we helped each other... Our detachments were closely connected to the revolutionary bands in these lands during the National Revival and during the Balkan Wars, and they launched joint military actions and they harboured each other“ (Hoxha, 1983). Despite this statement, he did not mention Macedonia. It is clear that E. Hoxha was speaking of the collaboration between Bulgarians and Albanians in the regions where they are neighbours – precisely in Macedonia, where together, they carried out the Ohrid-Debar Uprising in 1913. E. Hoxha refrained from directly referring to the ethnic affiliation of the majority of Macedonia’s population, whose language is a part of the Slavic language group, but clearly recognised „the aspirations of the Yugoslavs to undermine the struggle of the Bulgarians and neglect them regarding the Macedonian Question“.

In his book, E. Hoxha also described details of his visit to Bulgaria in 1947, when he was accompanied by Kristo Temelko (Hristo Temelkov). On their way to Sofia, they passed through Belgrade, where they were given a very cold reception by J. B. Tito. E. Hoxha shared that „I was left with the impression that Tito received us just to remind us that our visit to Sofia or Moscow or wherever else, always goes through Belgrade. He treated us in a manner by which we would understand that we must not step over what was allowed to us in our relations with the Bulgarians“.

The letter of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party regarding E. Hoxha’s book „The Titoites“, the conclusion was made that as far as it „concerns the relations between the two Balkan countries, one of which is our neighbour, and the events in which we do not participate, it is desirable to outline the place of our country in these relations in a more detailed review. To what degree and how we should use the crisis in the relations between Albania and Yugoslavia and our policy towards them should be examined through the prism of our national and international interests. These are all questions which must constantly be answered by our scientific and practical thought“. However, once again, Sofia was not prepared for such a geopolitical game, and because of this, it was not able to take advantage of the crisis, evidently caused by the fact that the principle of reciprocity in Albanian-Yugoslav relations was no longer working and the possibility of improving the situation of the people of Bulgarian descent living in Albania and all this presented.

The death of E. Hoxha in 1985 and the failure of T. Zhivkov to become close to the new Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev additionally limited the possibilities for Albania and Bulgaria to find a permanent solution to the problems existing between the two countries. This became possible only after the totalitarian regimes fell and the process of democratization in Eastern Europe began.

## *Chapter IV*

### **FROM DENIAL TO RECOGNITION**

#### **4.1. The transition to democracy and the recognition of the Bulgarian national minority in Albania**

At the beginning of 1990, mass anti-communist protests erupted in Albania. The authorities in Tirana were forced to reject the course they had taken and in the spring, they introduced laws, expanding the independence and self-government of companies, and in the summer, they allowed several thousand Albanians to leave the country. In November, the Albanian Labour Party announced a course of „separation of the authorities between the party and the government“, conclusively granting the right to enter or leave the country freely, declared freedom of religion and adopted a new election law.

However, the refusal to allow opposing political parties to be founded caused massive demonstrations of students and workers on December 8th, 1990, in Tirana and other Albanian cities. Under the pressure of these events, the authorities in Tirana announced a transition to a multiparty system on December 12th, 1990. On February 22nd, 1991, the Prime Minister A. Çarçani, who had been appointed to this position when E. Hoxha was in power, was removed from power. Multiparty elections for the National Assembly of Albania were held on March 31st. This resulted in the alteration of the Constitution and the declaration of civil and political freedom. In the following period, however, there was political instability and because of this, on June 1st, early parliamentary elections were announced.

During this period, the main political parties in Albania, despite the existing ideological differences between them, united behind the position for „the pursuit of European and Euro-Atlantic integration“. The foreign-policy orientation of Bulgaria was similar. This became the foundation for the two countries to get closer and solve the matters they inherited from the past. At the same time, however, the authorities in the Republic of North Macedonia were significantly more active and managed to establish their first contacts with representatives of the people who had self-identified as Macedonians in Albania. In July of 1990, the Macedonian government del-

egation headed by the prime minister Nikola Kljusev, after a meeting with the Albanian prime minister Ylli Bufi, also visited the village of Pustec. In the words of Macedonian president Kiro Gligorov: „We then began to carry out the idea to help our fellow countrymen in these lands too“ (Gligorov, 2000). By this suggestion and with direct aid from Skopje, the political party of the Macedonians in Albania „Bratska“ was created. During this period, or a bit later, several associations for Macedonist purposes such as „Prespa“, „Mir“, „Bratstvo“, „MAS“ (Macedonian Aegean Society), „Gora“, „Most“, and „Ilinden“ were also founded. Most of them were part of the union „Community of the Macedonians in Albania“.

On August 2nd, 1991, the Albanian government placed the transmitter of Radio Korçë at the disposal of Macedonian journalists from Radio Ohrid, who began to broadcast programs in the so called Macedonian language to the population of Mala Prespa. One year later, on August 11th, 1992, using the practice of „reciprocity“, that had existed since the time of Enver Hoxha, Albania and Republic of North Macedonia signed a treaty for opening Macedonian schools. There were plans to open them, not only in Mala Prespa, but also in Gollobordë and other regions under the condition that „this has to be requested by the local residents“ (Macedonia, 1992). Such a request, however, was made only by the association „Prespa“, which officially stated: „Let us ask Macedonia for help... to teach us the Macedonian language, to bring us books and exchange them“ (Todoroska, 2014). The request for teaching the so called Macedonian language, in reality, confirms the conclusion that the language in which the students were educated in Mala Prespa before 1991 was not the Skopjan literary norm.

The authorities in the Republic of North Macedonia skilfully took advantage of the situation and in 1993 the Ministry of Education and Physical Exercise of the Republic of North Macedonia entrusted the state publishing house „Prosvetno Delo“ in Skopje to publish four school books, written in the Skopjan literary norm, intended especially for Albania: a primer for 1st grade, a spelling-book for 2nd grade, mathematics textbook for 3rd grade, and an exercise-book. The purpose of these school books was to transfer the previous education in the Bulgarian Prespa dialect, written with Bulgarian letters, to the Skopjan literary norm. In order to achieve this, part of the texts were in the Prespa dialect, and the other part was selected from similar textbooks, used in the Republic of North Macedonia, written using the orthography of the so called Macedonian language. In this way, after a

45-year long break, the alphabet modified in 1945 by Blaže Koneski, with the characteristic letters to it ќ, ѓ, љ, њ, and ј, was introduced once again in the schools in Mala Prespa.

During this initial period of the democratic changes in Albania, the activities of the Macedonist formations were not met with the support from the population that Skopje expected. For example, the association „Mir,“ that focussed its attention on the Gollobordë region, did not manage to develop its program: It is more famous among the local population with scandals regarding the allocated funds from the Republic of North Macedonia. For this reason, on March 2nd, 2012, another attempt was made to bring Macedonism to Gollobordë with the foundation of the association „Most“ with headquarters in the village of Trebishte. However, it also did not manage to develop its work. The case of the association „Bratstvo“ in Tirana is peculiar. It set as its primary goal to arrange for „Macedonian passports for the Macedonians in Albania. For this, the locals had to pay 3,000 lekë and all of the money was used by the management of the association for personal gain“ (Todoroska, 2014). The association „MAS“ was also not able to develop its program in the village of Vrabnik where it was founded.

The aforementioned Macedonist formations served for political purposes. This is very clear in the statement of the union „Community of the Macedonians in Albania“, according to which „today there are around 150,000 ethnic Macedonians in Albania, who live primarily in the districts Mala Prespa, Gollobordë, and Gora, but also in all of the large cities in Albania: Tirana, Korçë, Elbasan, and others“. This was similar to the position that the authorities in Skopje wanted, but it was not coordinated with the actual situation in Albania. For example, during the population census taken in 2011, only 5,512 people or 0.2% declared themselves as Macedonians in the country. This result shows the untenability of the Skopjan thesis.

However, the democratic changes in Albania after 1990 did not lead to the activation of only those people of Bulgarian descent, who were registered as Macedonians. Despite the fact that Bulgaria did not display more significant interest during this period, people sent from the Republic of North Macedonia, who were supposed to help „the Macedonians“ in Albania, encountered the fact that some of these people preserved their Bulgarian self-consciousness and during their contacts with them, they said they were Bulgarians. This information, containing specific names and addresses, was delivered to Spas Tashev in Bulgaria and in 1992, the first contacts

with Albanian citizens with a Bulgarian self-consciousness were made and, later, were followed by a visit on site and research on the ground.

In their contacts with the people of Bulgarian descent after 1992, several specific features of the different regions were noted. In Gollobordë, most of the population, without taking into account its religious affiliation, stated they were Bulgarian and called their language Bulgarian. In fact, the lasting perception that this language was Bulgarian was the main sign for determining ethnicity and exercised the greatest influence for identification. The group of people who self-identify as „Macedonians“ is very small. There, even a certain resentment for the term „Macedonian“ can be observed. Confirmation of this conclusion is a letter from a Bulgarian activist from this region, in which he states that „something else that would be interesting to you is that people in Gollobordë were more interested in Bulgaria, rather than in Macedonia“. During these first contacts of Bulgarian citizens with the population of Gollobordë, it was discovered that two organizations had been founded there, without any existing contacts with Bulgaria and on their own initiative, as early as 1991.

The first one is the workers association „Gollobordë,“ with its head office in the city of Elbasan. Its purpose is to defend the trade-union interests of its members – around 3,000 people who, being construction workers in Gollobordë, migrated to the inner parts of Albania and settled in the larger industrial centers. In 1994, membership in the association rose to 10,000. Despite the fact that association membership is based on the field of labour and the region, and not on ethnicity, in a letter to S. Tashev from July 13th, 1992, the board of directors states that „the association „Gollobordë“ is a workers' association and in its ranks there are exclusively workers from the region Gollobordë or who migrated from there, who speak Bulgarian“. In the same document, it is written „back then when we founded our association, we set as a goal to make connections with other Albanian people of Bulgarian descent, with the Bulgarian Government and with other organizations“ (letter from the board of directors of the „Gollobordë“ association sent to S. Tashev in 1992). Two years later, in relation to an initiative of the Macedonian Orthodox Church to restore the medieval church of „Saint Jovan Vladimir“ near Elbasan, the association's board of directors met with a delegation of Macedonian priests and told them: „You cannot restore this as a Macedonian church, because the church is Bulgarian... You have come to the wrong address as we, the people from Gollobordë, speak Bulgarian,



and not Macedonian“ (letter from the board of directors of the „Gollobordë“ association sent to S. Tashev in 1994).

The second organization that was founded was the Ethnocultural Association „Gollobordë“, with its head office in Tirana. Its president was Ramazan Çadri, a researcher at the Institute of Language and Literature, and the vice-president was Mitro Shuktu. The members of the association number over 200 intellectuals who originated from the region of Gollobordë. On December 22nd, 1992, the association sent a letter to S. Tashev, in which it stated that, in its program, there is „a separate section that provides for cases when there is a need for collaboration with various agencies and institutions in Bulgaria and Macedonia“ (letter from R. Çadri to S. Tashev, 1992). Despite showing willingness to co-operate with either or both of the countries, the Ethnocultural Association „Gollobordë“ severely criticized the Macedonist propaganda, as they do not accept its methods and goals (Zëri i Popullit, 1991). The letter from the association states that „the Slavic speech... in our lands is called Bulgarian“. The willingness to co-operate with Bulgaria is also confirmed: „At this stage of our work, it would be interesting to get acquainted with the research on Bulgarian matters from linguistic, historical, folklore, ethnographic or other points of view, that directly or indirectly, refer to matters related to the regions of Gollobordë. Of course, this requires closer cooperation with the Macedonian Science Institute in Sofia, as well as with other establishments and institutions in your Academy of Sciences“. The fact that for the entire period of the existence of the association, the authorities in the Republic of North Macedonia have avoided all contacts with it, is also indicative.

The ethnocultural situation in the village of Vrabnik is relatively close to that of Gollobordë. There the term „Macedonian“ is significantly more common, but it is perceived in the context of the succession of the descendants of the fighters and carriers of the idea for liberating the geographical area Macedonia. Despite this more common usage of the term, the majority of the residents of the village openly state their Bulgarian nationality. During this time, a church committee was present in Vrabnik. The goal they set for themselves was the restoration of the local church, that had been turned into a warehouse during the atheistic regime in Albania. What is characteristic of the local church, is that in the 1920s, the residents of Vrabnik restored the Bulgarian inscriptions on the icons, about which a significant amount of information is stored in the archive of the Ministry

of Foreign Affairs and Religious Denominations. On February 22nd, 1993, the church committee wrote to S. Tashev that every day, they have been waiting for another visit to Albania „so that the solution to our problems, which remain completely unresolved up to this point, could appear, as well as the solution of other problems we have. „ (letter from the church committee in the village of Vrabnik sent to S. Tashev, 1993).

The situation in Mala Prespa is a little different. There, the population was educated in the spirit of the Macedonism after 1945, under the conditions of a totalitarian state. At the same time, the specifics of the Albanian Macedonism, which unlike the Skopjan model, lacks an anti-Bulgarian element, leading to the preservation of a number of ethnocultural signs. For example, there are no deliberately introduced loan-words (mostly from Serbian) in the local language, preserved within the family and others. For these reasons, despite the fact that, at first, most of the population identifies as Macedonian, in more detailed interviews it was established, that the population does not differentiate between „Bulgarian“ and „Macedonian“ as separate ethnonyms (New Macedonia, 1993). In this period, in the Prespa region, an informal group headed by Sotir Mitrev from the village of Pustec emerged. This group later became a branch of the Bulgarian Cultural-Educational Society „Ivan Vazov“ in Tirana. At the same time, mostly among the younger people in Mala Prespa, one can observe a display of a Macedonian self-consciousness separate from the Bulgarian.

During the initial on-the-ground research on the people of Bulgarian descent in Albania in 1992 and 1993, the presence of a so called double identity was established– when talking to Bulgarian citizens, a part of the population say they are Bulgarians, and when talking to Macedonian citizens they say they are Macedonians. In the detailed analysis of the groups of people who declare themselves as Bulgarians, Macedonians or with a double national identity, it has been established that besides the various self-identifications, there are no other ethnocultural differences. In the different villages, the people from all the three groups, are relative to one another, speak the same dialect, have the same folklore and other identical ethnographic characteristics. For example, in 1994 Adrian Fetahu (whose parents were born in the village of Trebishte, Gollobordë) submitted an application to the Minister of Education of the Republic of Bulgaria, in which he stated that his „mother tongue was Bulgarian“ (Appendices, facsimile 16). At the same time, Adrian Fetahu is the nephew of the president

of the Macedonian Association „Mir“ Kimet Fetahu and of Izair Fetahu, chairman of the Human Rights Party founded in 1991, that, in the same time period, also defended Macedonist positions. Later, after he became acquainted with the historical facts, Izair Fetahu renounced his Macedonist views and created a coalition with the party of the Greek minority in Albania. During a joint press conference of the two, the leader of the Greek party Vangel Dule introduced I. Fetahu as the president of „the party that defends the Bulgarians in Gollobordë“ (MKD, 2013). This example clearly shows the reciprocal connections and the constant transfer of people from the group with Macedonian self-consciousness to the group with Bulgarian self-consciousness. For this reason, some researchers later used the term „Macedonians/Bulgarians“ as representing people of the same group. Referring to these people, the term „of our country“ has solidified as a compromise regarding their national identity, and the language they speak is also referred to as „of our country“.

During the school year 1992-1993, in Bulgaria, several places for Bulgarians from Albania, who would come to study in Bulgarian universities, were designated for the first time. Three students were accepted, but due to the economic crisis in Albania at the time and not being able to travel through the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia, they could not arrive in Bulgaria. This became the reason for the two organizations of people of Bulgarian descent in Albania to turn to the authorities in Bulgaria with an official request to create viable channels by which Bulgarians from Albania could study in Bulgarian universities. This appeal is one of the reasons for the adoption of Ordinance 103 of the Council of Ministers for Realization of Educational Activities among Bulgarians Abroad on May 31st, 1993. In the school year 1993 – 1994, the first Bulgarians students from Albania were accepted in Bulgaria. Their transportation to Sofia was organized by the IMRO – Union of the Macedonian Associations. For this purpose, a bus was rented and the visas required to travel through the Republic of North Macedonia were paid for. After taking a one month course in the modern Bulgarian literary language, these young Bulgarians from Albania were successfully integrated in the Bulgarian educational system.

Extending the contacts of Bulgaria with the Bulgarians in Albania is connected to the rapid improvement in bilateral relations. In February of 1993, the Bulgarian president Zhelyu Zhelev made his first official visit to Albania and he and his colleague Sali Berisha signed a Pact for Friendship

and Cooperation. During the official talks between the two presidents, for the first time since 1944, the question of the Bulgarians in Albania was raised and a formula for legalizing their status was discussed. In the following period, taking care of the Bulgarians in Albania became an inseparable element of Bulgarian foreign policy. In 1994, the administration of President Zhelyu Zhelev bought a bus as a gift for the villages in Gollobordë. In 1997, after the financial pyramids in Albania collapsed and the anarchy that transpired, President Petar Stoyanov initiated the humanitarian action „Gollobordë“ for the Bulgarians in this region. In May of 2000, during his official visit to Albania, P. Stoyanov met with representatives of the local Bulgarian community and this act on his side had a serious political and psychological effect. During this visit, contacts with the Bulgarians in Kukës Gora were also reenergized. The raising of the question of Albanian citizens of Bulgarian ethnic origin by the Bulgarian side was put into a practice. This principle was also undeviatingly pursued by the next two Bulgarian presidents, Georgi Parvanov and Rosen Plevneliev.

During the diplomatic preparations for the formation and presentation of the Bulgarian position on the matter of the Bulgarians in Albania, the coordinating role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been especially important. This aspect has become a significant priority in its work. This priority was also adopted by the legislators and the executive bodies of the state of Bulgaria. For example, during the meeting of the chairman of the Bulgarian Parliament, Ognyan Gerdzhikov, with his Albanian counterpart Servet Palumbi, the question of the Bulgarians in Albania was also raised. Later on, in all official contacts of parliamentary representatives, this question has been raised for discussion. During the meeting of the Bulgarian Prime Minister, Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, with his Albanian colleague Fatos Nano the subject of the Bulgarians in Albania was one of the main topics of conversation. The position of his successors, Sergey Stanishev and Boyko Borisov, has been similar. The Foreign Ministers Nadezhda Mihaylova, Solomon Passy, Ivaylo Kalfin, Nikolay Mladenov, Kristian Vigenin, and Ekaterina Zaharieva have constantly raised the subject in their official contacts with their Albanian counterparts. During the visits of Bulgarian delegations to Albania, there have always been meetings with representatives of the Bulgarian community. In Tirana, Elbasan, and Korçë, Bulgarian Sunday schools have opened. Given this situation, the Albanian authorities have found it ever more difficult to ignore the existence of a Bulgarian community in Albania.

Within the framework of these bilateral discussions, not only did the Albanian leadership not object, but it confirmed the existence of Albanian citizens with a Bulgarian self-consciousness. The Albanian Prime Minister Aleksandër Meksi made a statement during his visit in Bulgaria in November of 1993, that the Albanian state has no problems with the Albanian citizens of Bulgarian descent and they will do all that is necessary for their well-being. In 1994, during his official visit to Bulgaria, Albanian President Sali Berisha stated at a press conference that he cannot give an exact number, but „the Bulgarians in Albania are several thousand“ (Gollobordë, 1994). In July of 2004, the spokesman of the Albanian Parliament, Skender Duka, stated: „We cannot talk of any discrimination towards the Bulgarian minority in Albania, as the country has signed all the conventions and agreements on this matter (Focus, 2004). During the visit of Bulgarian Prime Minister B. Borisov to Tirana in October of 2012, the Prime Minister of Albania Sali Berisha stated: „I stand by the principle that all the citizens of this country, which we live in, are completely free to declare themselves of whatever ethnicity they want or feel affiliated to. I consider that this is a standard that we should all uphold“ (Blitz, 2012).

In this period, the fact that the active contacts between the Albanian and the Bulgarian ruling factors did not depend on the internal political orientation of the two national governments is extremely important. The Albanian cabinet, which was orientated to the right, cooperated actively with the governments of Lyuben Berov and Zhan Videnov, which leaned more to the middle-left of the political spectrum, and later the right-wing government of Ivan Kostov was on good terms with the socialist cabinets in Albania led by Fatos Nano, Pandeli Majko, and Ilir Meta. This fact shows the pragmatism in the approach of the both states and how far away they both were from any kind of process of ideologization in bilateral relations.

During the period we have examined, Bulgarian academics have made significant contributions on the topic of the Bulgarians in Albania. Public opinion in Bulgaria has also displayed a great interest and empathy. Several non-governmental organizations have been very active in this matter. For example, the association for connections with the Bulgarians in Gollobordë, Gora, and Prespa called „Ognishte“, the foundation „Bulgarian Memory“, the association for anthropology, ethnology, and folklore „Ongal“, the Bulgarian Federation of Speleology and others can be mentioned. In 1993 and 1994, S. Tashev, Dinko Draganov and Nikolay

Kanchev published several issues of the newspaper „Gollobordë“, written in the Bulgarian literary language, but with the Albanian alphabet. Several research expeditions *in situ* were organized and a number of scientific and public forums dedicated to the Bulgarians in Albania were conducted.

Internationally, the topic of the Bulgarians in Albania was raised for the first time in 2004 by Milena Milotinova, a member of the Bulgarian Delegation in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. There, she stated that there are Bulgarians in Albania, living in Gollobordë, Mala Prespa and other regions, who have always been Albanian citizens and who identify as Bulgarians, and they should have the opportunity to benefit from all their rights granted to them by the documents of the Council of Europe. It was stated that they speak an archaic version of Bulgarian and they would like to preserve their culture and eventually have programs in their mother tongue in the Albanian media (Parliamentary Assembly, 2004). After her speech, M. Milotinova was greeted by several member of the Albanian Parliament about her statement.

In 2007, Bulgaria became a member state of the European Union. Some of the Bulgarian members of the European Parliament, among them, Andrey Kovachev, Angel Dzhambazki and others, initiated a discussion and the adoption of a resolution of the European Parliament, calling for Albania to recognize the Bulgarians on its territory as a national minority, which in practice ensured international support. In this way, the active Bulgarian regional and European policy created favourable circumstances for the recognition of the Bulgarians in Albania as a national minority. On February 3rd, 2017, Knut Fleckenstein, rapporteur for Albania, included in his texts, a special section, in which he recommended that the rights of the people of Bulgarian ethnic origin in the regions of Prespa, Gollobordë, and Gora to be included in the legislation of Albania and thus, this was practically guaranteed (European Parliament, 2017). This recommendation was taken into account and on February 15th, 2017, in a Resolution of the European Parliament, dedicated to the Report for Albania in 2016, in article 24, it is noted “that additional efforts are needed to protect the rights of all minorities in Albania through fully applying the respective legislation; it is recommended that the rights of the people of Bulgarian ethnic origin in the regions of Prespa, Gollobordë, and Gora be included in the legislation and guaranteed in practice“ (European Parliament, 2017).



Raising the question of the Bulgarians in Albania after 1991 also led to an increased interest by Albanian and foreign researchers. For example as early as 1992, the headquarters of the United States Department of the Army sponsored the research in Albania by the Federal Research Division at the United States Library of Congress. In the publication that followed, it was stated that among the ethnic groups, besides Greeks, there are also Vlachs, Roma, Serbs, and Bulgarians, who amount to around 10% of the population (Federal Research Division, 1994). Later on, the same publication stated that „the less numerous ethnic groups, including Bulgarians, Roma, Jews, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Serbs, and Vlachs amount to around 2% of the total population. The people of Macedonian and Bulgarian descent live primarily in the border zone near lake Prespa“. This American research shows that as early as 1992, the people of Bulgarian and Macedonian self-consciousness inhabit the same territory and it is difficult to differentiate between them.

The book of James Pettifer called „Albania“ published in 1996 is of special interest. In it, he examines the ethnic minorities on its territory and pays special attention to the people registered as Macedonians. It is notable that of all minorities in the country, he refers only to „the Macedonians“ with quotation marks. According to him, their number is between 10,000 and 15,000 people. Concerning the part of this group that lives in the south situated around lake Ohrid, J. Pettifer emphasizes that „they speak a language closely related to Bulgarian and it was thought that they are descendants of immigrants from the east who settled in this area when it was under Bulgarian rule“ (Pettifer, 1996). About the language of Gorani in the region around the village of Shishtavec, he reckons that „the Bulgarian element is predominant“.

In 2003, the organization for observing the processes in the Balkans and the Caucasus based in Italy and called „Transeuropa“ published the article „Bulgarians or Macedonians? A minority in Albania“, in which the dispute regarding the ethnic belonging of the population of Bulgarian descent in Albania is examined. It states that between 50 and 80 000 Bulgarians live in Albania (Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa, 2003).

In 2007, Manjola Xhaxho from the Lund University in Sweden, examined the situation of the recognized Macedonian minority in Albania in her graduate thesis „Minority Rights and the Republic of Albania: Missing the Implementation“ She wrote that „According to the data from the

Ministry of Education, in 1935-1936, there were 11,459 inhabitants, whose mother tongue was Macedonian, or otherwise stated, 'Bulgarophones' (Xhaxho, 2007). In Albanian documents from this period, the „Macedonian language“ is not mentioned anywhere. In her research, M. Xhaxho, in practice, states that those Albanian citizens registered after 1944 as Macedonians are actually a part of the group of ethnic Bulgarians.

In 2016, Bashkim Shala analysed the process in Gora and stated that the minority living in the region is taking the Bulgarian path. The author promoted the idea that Gorani, settled in the region between the 11th and 13th centuries. He reckons that they are descendants of „members of the Bogomil movement, a neo-gnostic Christian sect that originated in the First Bulgarian Empire“ and defends the official Albanian position that „a bilingual community“ lives in Gora. B. Shala examined the policies of the neighbouring countries regarding the population in Gora in recent years, discovered the attempts of Serbia, from the beginning of the 1990s, to proclaim the Gorani as a Serbian minority, and after that, attempts by the Republic of North Macedonia to pass the Gorani off as a Macedonian minority and to offer them a citizenship (Shala, 2016). Despite these actions, however, the population in Gora defended its Bulgarian origins.

In May 2017, the Home Office – the ministerial department of Great Britain, responsible for overseeing immigration and security, published its report „Albania: Ethnic Minority Groups“ (Home Office, 2017). In it, besides a Macedonian minority, the presence of a Bulgarian minority is also noted. In the report, the debates in the European Parliament regarding the Bulgarian minority living in the three regions of Albania – Gora, Gollubordë, and Mala Prespa are followed, and in relation to this, it is stated that „a document of the European Parliament, calling Albania to recognize the Bulgarian minority and guarantee its rights within its legislation, have caused a strong reaction in the Macedonian media. They accuse Bulgaria of following a program, aimed at rejecting the existence of the Macedonian nation. The state information agency MIA (Macedonian Information Agency, Ed.) notes that they (the Bulgarians, Ed.) wanted – and succeeded – to push the idea that the Macedonian minority in the three aforementioned regions is actually Bulgarian“. In the same report, the situation in Kukës Gora is reviewed and it is noted that „it is comprised of nine villages, whose residents speak in a Slavonic language, similar to the Macedonian and the Bulgarian“. About its population, it states that, among the neighbouring

Albanians, it is also known „by several exonyms: Bulgaretsë (Bulgarians), Torbeshë (“bag carriers”), and Gorani“.

Despite the fact that the aforementioned statements are not accurate, the discussion on the matter of the Bulgarians in Albania brought the debates onto Albanian territory. The new Constitution of Albania, adopted in 1998, provides for equality among the citizens of the country regardless of their ethnic or religious affiliation. According to article 20 of the Constitution, „Persons who belong to national minorities exercise their human rights and freedoms in full equality before the law“. Paragraph 2 of the same article guarantees their right to express (self-identify) their cultural, religious, and linguistic belonging freely and the right to study and to be taught in their mother tongue, and to unite in organizations and associations for the protection of their interests and identity (Stanev, 2016).

The new legal framework put the Albanian government into a certain difficulty. In the same year, the foreign minister of Albania, at the time Paskal Milo, stated that regarding the matter of the disputed minority, that „after World War II, we know this minority as Macedonian. I would rather not clarify why this path was chosen, the communist regime took this decision and now it is difficult for us to change it“. (The Balkans, 2001). Precisely due to this passivity, it was not before 2017 that Tirana began discussions for a new bill for the protection of the rights of national minorities. Some of its authors suggested that Bulgarian be included in the group of the officially recognized national minorities. This proposition, however, was met with opposition by several Albanian, Greek, and mostly Macedonist formations.

The Albanian reaction can be presented briefly with the position of Ramazan Hoxha, president of the Albanian patriotic association „Haziz Lila – Gollobordë“, who stated on September 11th, 2017, that “There is no Bulgarian minority, either in Gollobordë, or the rest Albania”. The arguments for such a statement were that „national minorities are the people, who remained outside of the borders of their country. Minorities are the natural extension of the local population of a country in the territories of a neighbouring country. But in fact, both the region of Gollobordë and the region of Gora, are surrounded on all sides by Albanian lands and an Albanian population. Therefore, the *Gollobordi* and the *Gorani* cannot be designated as national minorities“ (Hoxha, 2017). The author also reiterated the well-known idea of „bilingualism“. He claims that „the only aspect in which they (the Bulgarians, Ed.) differ relies on the bilingualism that ex-

ists in these regions. But the existing bilingualism in no way discredits the Albanian ethnicity of the residents. This bilingualism has appeared under certain historical conditions, as a result of centuries long relations under the Slavic conquerors and has remained as a language anachronism to present day“. Later on, R. Hoxha promoted the idea that existed before the 1960s, that in Albania, the religious affiliation to Islam is equivalent to the Albanian ethnicity. According to him, „the religion has played a vital role in certain moments for determining and preserving the Albanian national identity in the province of Gollobordë. Over 99% of the population of this region is Muslims... They have become Muslims in order to avoid the savage assimilation of the Slavs, who had entered their homes in Gollobordë... The Albanian population in Gollobordë has become almost completely Muslim, so that could preserve their Albanian national identity and avoid being assimilated by the Slavs“.

The reaction of the Macedonist organizations in Albania was not less unfounded and contradictory of polite demeanor. They reckoned that „this is about Macedonians, assimilated by Albania, that for the sake of acquiring Bulgarian passports, clearly declare as Bulgarians. The Bulgarian state has been systematically working for the Bulgarization of the Macedonian minority in Albania for years, but nobody has done anything to stop this pernicious trend“. Especially harsh was the reaction of the „Ilinden“ association in Tirana, who were worried by the fact that people, acquiring Bulgarian citizenship sign declarations that „they are Bulgarians and that their ancestors were Bulgarians“. For this reason, the association appealed to the Albanian government to take serious action concerning the situation and the rights of the representatives of the Macedonian nation in the Republic of Albania“. The party „Macedonian Alliance for European Integration“ also protested against including the Bulgarian minority in the bill. Its secretary-general Vasil Sterjoski stated at a press conference in the region of Korçë that „the Macedonians in Albania are not Bulgarians, and the only Bulgarians in Albania are those who work in the Bulgarian embassy in Tirana“.

When promoting this position, the Macedonist groups resorted to obvious falsifications. For example, they spread the statement that „there are Bulgarian and French documents from 1923, which confirm that the population in the border regions between Albania and Macedonia thought of themselves and registered as Macedonian“ (AktuelnObjektivno, 2019).

This kind of position from the Macedonist groups in Albania does not come as surprise. If one traces their activities after 1990, it can be discovered that they are connected to the cover up and destruction of historical facts and even artifacts, which disclose the past and the present of the population of Bulgarian descent in Albania. During field studies in 2019, several people from the region of Mala Prespa stated that during the census taken in Albania in 2011, they declared themselves as Bulgarians. In the following statistical publication, however, Bulgarians were not mentioned. The interviewees think that the ethnic affiliation that they declared was erased by the municipal electoral commission, which, during this period, was under the political control of Macedonist formations. Probably the worst act of vandalism took place in 2014, when the bell of the church „Saints Peter and Paul“ in the village of Zarnovsko in Mala Prespa, sanctified in 1911, was stolen. On it there was an inscription that it was a gift of the „God-loving and patriotic Bulgarians from the city of Struga“. Despite the intervention of the Albanian police, the bell was not found.

In response to the Macedonist statements and actions in 2017, the associations of the Bulgarians in Albania, supported by the foundation „Bulgarian Memory“, the Agency for Bulgarians Abroad, etc., quickly organized and in less than a week they collected more than 3,000 signatures insisting on formalizing the status of the Bulgarian minority, along with all the others ethnic minorities in the country. The petition was submitted to the Albanian Parliament, and a copy of it was also submitted to the European Parliament. In addition, 1,500 more signatures were collected to be attached, in case the authorities in Tirana did not recognize the Bulgarian minority. Of the 4,500 collected signatures, 850 are from people from the region of Mala Prespa, around 1 000 from the region of Kukës Gora, and the remaining 2, 650 signatures are of Bulgarians from Gollobordë.

The Albanian Parliament took into account the active position of the local Bulgarian community and on October 13th, 2017, with 102 votes in favour, 10 against and 1 abstention, the Law on the Protection of National Minorities was adopted. In it, for the first time in the history of modern Albania, the Bulgarian ethnic community, along with the community of the people registered as Macedonians, was officially granted the status of a national minority.

In November of 2017, Bulgarian Vice President Iliana Yotova visited Tirana and met with the then president of Albania, Ilir Meta, Spokesman



*The stolen bell of the church in the village of Zarnovsko, Mala Prespa. The inscription on it says: „Paid for by the God-loving and patriotic Bulgarians from the city of Struga, temporarily living in Târgu Jiu, Romania“. Photo: Georgi Stamenov*

of the Parliament Gramoz Ruçi, and Prime Minister Edi Rama. During the meeting, she stated that „all the representatives of the Albanian institutions gave their assurances that the newly adopted Law on the Protection of National Minorities would be abided by and would not just be a formality“ (The President of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2017). Shortly after this, on January 28th, 2019, Albanian national television began airing daily short programs in the Bulgarian literary language. Appointing a Bulgarian representative to the Committee for the Minorities in Albania is awaited. In this way, the Bulgarian minority will be officially represented in this Albanian government body.

The recognition of the Bulgarian minority in Albania has led to changes in tone and the publicity in the publications of local researchers



and media. For example, Migena Balla, despite the fact that she keeps defending the concept of the „bilingualism“ of this population, admits that „the Bulgarian minority was the last minority to be added to the list of minority groups in Albania in 2017. Until now, it was known as a Macedonian minority and sometimes as a Bulgarian-Macedonian one“ (Balla, 2018). In the same research, M. Balla stated that „the recognition of this minority (the Bulgarian, Ed.) has caused various reactions that made it impossible for us to have accurate information whether certain communities are Macedonian or Bulgarian. It is considered that in Albania, the Bulgarians live primarily in the regions of Bilishta, Korçë, Gollobordë, and Mala Prespa and their number amounts to thirty thousand people“.

Regarding the region of Gora, M. Balla wrote that „the Gorani minority lives in the municipality of Kukës. It encompasses the regions of the former municipalities Shishtavec and Zapod with around 5,000 people. Their mother tongue is Gorani, which closely resembles both the Bulgarian and the Macedonian language. The territory where the Gorani community resides is situated on the border of three countries: Albania, Kosovo, and Macedonia. In Albania, there are 9 villages. The number of the entire population on the territory of Gora is around 24,000. The villages in which Bulgarian is spoken are: Borye, Oreshe, Carnolevo, Shishtavec, Orgosta, Pakishta, Kosharishte, Zapod, and Ochikle“. Without getting into details, M. Balla states that the community of the people of Bulgarian descent „uses the Albanian language in social and official circumstances. Those living in the regions, who were earlier known as a Macedonian minority, studied both Macedonian and Albanian in school. Others speak only Bulgarian, in the dialect passed on over several generations“.

The article by M. Balla reveals the increased academic interest in Albania in the people of Bulgarian descent, as well as the lack of real knowledge about this community. Using the category „Gorani language“ that „closely resembles Bulgarian and Macedonian „, is an indication of their poor knowledge of Bulgarian dialectology. The dialect spoken in Gora belongs to the group of western Bulgarian dialects and is an inseparable part of the northwestern Bulgarian dialects spoken in the geographical region of Macedonia. At the same time, the phonetic differences between the literary languages of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia, examined by M. Balla as „Bulgarian and Macedonian language“ is smaller than, for example, the difference between the Gheg and Tosk dialects of Albanian.

In the article „The Tradition, the Beauties and the Language of Gollobordë“, dedicated to the scientific expedition of the Russian Albanologist Alexander Novik and published in 2018, Klotilda Saraçini states that Albanian and Bulgarian are spoken in „Gollobordë „ (Saraçini, 2018).

The article by Alexander Dhima „Are there Fundamental Characteristics in the Ethnocultural Heritage of the „Small Minorities“ in Albania? – Gollobordë“, published in 2019, is of especially great interest. For the first time in Albania, facts of an historical, demographic and ethnocultural character, relative to the region of Gollobordë, were released to the public (Dhima, 2019). The author points out that the name of the region comes from Old Bulgarian and Albanian words meaning „naked hill“. The toponym „bordë“ also exists in the areas around other villages in the region, as well as on the territories of villages in Bulgaria and Kosovo.

In his research, A. Dhima wrote that the population of the Gollobordë region speaks an ancient Bulgarian dialect, that has been passed on from generation to generation, despite the inherent deformations due to continuous isolation. The people themselves say they speak Bulgarian („zbori bulgarsko“). According to this, most of the residents of these villages in the region are bilingual, as the ancient Bulgarian dialect is used in the home, while Albanian is used mainly in the cities, where people from Gollobordë have moved to.

He points out the fact that there is also a hypothesis, according to which the local language in Gollobordë is Macedonian. Without delving into debates regarding how close the Bulgarian and its Macedonian dialects are, A. Dhima turns his attention to the political tools, used by the highest circles in the government of the Republic of North Macedonia, aimed at influencing the Muslims in Gollobordë, also known as Torbeshë, to declare themselves as Macedonian Muslims.

These publications in Albania, dedicated to the Bulgarians in this country, have also led to more open expressions of the Bulgarian self-consciousness of this population. For example, a number of Albanian citizens of Bulgarian descent, including several working for the government, have disclosed their Bulgarian ethnic affiliation in interviews for the Bulgarian media and have discussed current problems in the regions, in which they live (Mançeva, 2019).

## **4.2. Contemporary ethno-demographic processes among Bulgarians in Albania**

The tumultuous political changes in Albania after 1990, combined with infrastructural and economic growth, affect mainly the territories along the coastline, the central parts of the country and the valley regions. In its peripheral areas to the east, where the population of Bulgarian descent is concentrated, the changes have come exceptionally slowly, and not all of them have had a positive effect. For example, since 1990, the only connection between the Bulgarian villages in Kukës Gora and Gollobordë and the rest of Albania is a gravel road, constructed by the Italian Army after 1939. The medical services that the population of Bulgarian descent in the villages in the two regions receives is of extremely low quality. Phone reception is bad and the people in Mala Prespa and Gollobordë are often forced to use the services of the Macedonian telecommunication companies.

The situation has additionally been aggravated throughout the period between 1994 and 2014, when on several occasions the territorial division of Albania was altered and the number of the Albanian municipalities was reduced from 384 to 61. During this period, the municipalities in Gollobordë were officially three. Golemo Ostreni was the center for the villages Malo Ostreni, Orzhanovo, Radovesh, Konyovec, Leshnichan, Tuchepe, Vladi-merica, and Pasyanky, as well as for the villages Golyam Okshtun and Malak Okshtun, Torbachî, and Oreshnya populated by Albanians. Trebishta was the administrative center for the villages of Klenjë, Vormica, and Ginovec. Steblevo was the administrative center for the village of Sebishta, with a mixed population, and the villages of Zabzun, Borovo, Langa, Moglica, and Prodan with an Albanian population (Toncheva, 2013). According to latest Law on Territorial and Administrative Divisions and Units of Local Government from 2014, these municipalities were disbanded, and the territory of Gollobordë was divided, with one part assigned to the enlarged administrative unit Bulqizë, and the other to Librazhd. Within the two newly formed municipalities, the population is predominantly Albanian.

In Kukës Gora, before the administrative reform, there were two municipal centers. One of them was Shishtavec, to which belonged the three Gorani villages of Borye, Oreshek, and Carnolevo, and the other was Zapod with four Gorani villages: Orgosta, Pakishta, Kosharishta, and Ochikle. According to the new territorial reorganization, the administrative

center was transferred to Kukës. This change makes it difficult to find credible statistical information for the demographic processes and status in the two regions in the past and also today. Only the territory of Mala Prespa has remained unchanged regarding the administrative division, and the municipal center is in the village of Pustec.

The biggest problem of the three regions populated by people of Bulgarian descent is unemployment. The primary mean of livelihood is small mountain farming. People grow potatoes and there are relatively good conditions for ecological cattle breeding and animal husbandry. The timber industry and wood-processing are very poorly developed. In the villages in Mala Prespa, situated on lake Prespa, small family tourism is also developing.

The natural growth of the population in the regions inhabited by people of Bulgarian descent is now negative. In Mala Prespa for the period 2011 – 2017 the number of newborns was 127, and the number of deceased people was 209, forming a natural growth of -82.

Losses caused by negative migration growth are significantly bigger. Because of the bad economic situation, almost all of the male population travels away for work during the entire year to the inner parts of Albania or to neighbouring Greece or the Republic of North Macedonia, and some move even farther away. Since the middle of the 1990s, traveling for work has turned into a large wave of emigration. Because of losses due to migration, some of these villages are almost entirely depopulated.

As of 2019, around 1,500 people have moved from Mala Prespa to Korçë, around 400 to Tirana, and over 200 to other Albanian cities. The number of people that have migrated outside of Albania is also quite big. Around 650 people born in Mala Prespa live in the USA and Canada. In the European Union, they number over 500. As a result of these processes, while in 2001, the total number of the population of Mala Prespa, according to the census, was 4,152, in 2011 this number was 3,162 (Appendices, table 15). At the same time, according to the register of civil status in 2011, the number of people in Mala Prespa was 5,191. The difference of 2,029 people consists primarily of people who have migrated, but have not yet changed their administrative address. An interesting fact for the region is that for this period, 39.94% of the families, including unmarried couples, have no children. At the same time, the population of the regions in the age interval 0-14 is 14.59% (Instat, 2013).

According to the census taken in 2011, the average household size in Mala Prespa is 3.07 people. At the same time, the value of this indicator for Albania is 3.91. The existing difference between these two values of the same indicator is a direct consequence of the differences in the demographic factors that affect the region unfavourably.

The decrease in the population in Mala Prespa of school and work age is especially rapid. For example, the number of students in the village of Pustec in 1990 was 598, and in 2019 there were only 98. In Dolna Gorica, in 1990, there were 250 students, and in 2019 they numbered only 25. For this reason, a number of primary schools were closed in Mala Prespa. In 1999, the school in the village of Cerye closed, while in 2007, the primary school in the village of Zarnovsko, in 2010, it was the school in the village of Glombochani and in 2019, the in the village of Gorna Gorica closed. As of 2019, in Mala Prespa, there remain 1 high school in Pustec, 2 junior high schools in Pustec and Dolna Gorica and 5 primary schools. The number of students in the primary schools is also decreasing. In the village of Tuminec, they were 15, and in the village of Leska, only 4.

The demographic processes are similar in Gollobordë, where mostly the young and middle aged are affected. The traditional construction skills of the population of this region make the migration processes easier. For example, out of the 180 inhabited houses in 1991 in the village of Steblevo, as of 2000, only 10 remain. In the village of Vorbnica for the same period, out of 10, only 2 remain inhabited. As a result of migration, the population in the villages Golemo Ostreni, Trebishte, and Konyovec as of 2000 decreased by 50% for the previous 10 years, in Radovesh and Orzhanov the decrease was 30 – 40%, and in Malo Ostreni, Tuchepe, and Leshnichan around 20%. Due to the worsened age structure of the population, the maternity hospital in the village of Tuchepe no longer functions. The only remaining functional maternity hospital in Gollobordë is in the village of Ostreni. Pregnant women from the more remote villages with a population of Bulgarian descent are forced to give birth in Peshkopi and Bulqizë. According to the data in table 14, the total number of the population of Bulgarian descent in Gollobordë in 2001 was 6,774 people, and in 2011 it decreased to 4,476. In an administrative report from 2008 for all the villages with population of Bulgarian descent, it was indicated that the average household size was 3.47 people.

In this period which we have examined, a rapid decrease of the number of students is observed. For example, in 1991, in the junior high school

in Golemo Ostreni, there were 480 students from the same village, and from the neighbouring villages of Malo Ostreni, Orzhanov, and Radovesh. In 2019, the number of students in the same school dropped to 320, but besides the 4 aforementioned villages, there are also students from the following 3 as well: Konyovec, Leshnichan, and Okshtun. The changes in the village of Klenjë are especially drastic. In it, in 1991, there were around 500 students, and in 2019 there were none. The decrease in the number of children of school age has led to several schools closing in the area. Before 1991, there were 4 high schools and in almost every village in Gollobordë, there was a junior high school. Today, only one 1 high school is open in Golemo Ostreni, and 2 of the former high schools were transformed into junior high schools.

The families migrating from Gollobordë move to nearby and to more distant cities like Tirana, Elbasan, Durrës (Drach), Librazhd and others. The modern day migration flows among the population in Gollobordë repeat the practice from the 1960s and the 1970s. They settle in groups in newly built neighbourhoods. For example, 80% of the people, who live in the newly built neighbourhood in the city of Elbasan, are people of Bulgarian descent from Gollobordë. A similar phenomenon is observed in Tirana, as well. In the neighbourhoods „Kodra priftit“ (Priest’s hill), „Bregu i Lumit“ (River shore) and the suburbs around the Veterinary Institute, a large portion of the citizens is from this region, primarily from the villages Steblevo and Trebishte.

In the region of Kukës Gora, the total number of the population of Bulgarian descent is also decreasing. In 1997, the local historian Nazif Dokle researched the number of houses and residents of Kukës Gora. At that point, the total number of houses was 1,375, and the number of residents was 5,892. The average household size in the region in 1997 was 4.29 people. In 2001, research was done on the population of Kukës Gora as part of the United Nations Development Programme. There were registered 5,258 people and 1,221 houses. The average household size was 4.31 and it was higher than the average size in Mala Prespa and Gollobordë of the same time period. Again in 2001, according to the population census of Kukës Gora, the number of people was 5,138, and according to the census taken in 2011, this number had decreased to 4,056.

As of the present day, there is no process of schools being closed yet in the region of Kukës Gora. The 2 high schools (in Shishtevec and



Zapod), the 3 junior high schools (in Borye, Orgosta, and Carnolevo) and the 2 primary schools (Oreshak and Ochikle) continue to function. Despite this, the number of students keeps dropping with every consecutive year. On another topic, there has never been a maternity hospital in the region of Kukës Gora and the women of Bulgarian descent are forced to give birth in the city of Kukës.

According to Tanya Mangalakova, who visited Kukës Gora in 2008, the total number of the Gorani in Albania is more than 15,000 (Mangalakova, 2008). This means, that in this period around, 10,000 people of Bulgarian descent from this region have left it and live in the inner parts of the country. The people forming the migration flows from Kukës Gora also aim at settling compactly in certain neighbourhoods of the larger cities in Albania. For example, in Tirana, around 1,500 Gorani families have settled in Farkë e Vogël (the Little Farkë). In Durrës (Drach), around 1,000 families from Gora have settled in the neighbourhood Ishqneti. A significant number of people have also moved to the regional center Kukës. Outside the borders of the country, most of the people have migrated to Great Britain. As of now, around 1,000 people from Kukës Gora live in Birmingham and London.

After the democratic changes in Albania began at the beginning of the 1990s, the only settlement with a compact population of Bulgarian descent outside of the three aforementioned regions remains the village of Vrabnik. In 1993, its population was 360 people, in 2001 it was 223, and in 2011, only 107 people remain.

Throughout the examined period, significant changes in the population of the villages Drenovo and Boboshtica in the region of Korçë have occurred. While at the beginning of the 1990s, there were around 100 people of Bulgarian descent in both villages, as of 2019, there is not even one in Drenovo, and in Boboshtica, they are almost non-existent, thus the unique archaic Bulgarian dialect, with traces of the nasal pronunciation of the Old Bulgarian vowel *ѣ* (yus) has become extinct. There are around 100 descendants of Bulgarian heritage that once lived in these two villages in the region of Korçë, who now live in the city of Korçë and around 80 who now live in Tirana. There are also around 100 people that now live in Greece and the United States.

In the village of Lin, situated on the western shore of lake Ohrid, the people of Bulgarian descent have also migrated or were assimilated at the

beginning of the 1990s. The fate of the descendants of the Bulgarians, who once lived in Poletto, is similar. In 2010, the last Bulgarians in the village of Urbele disappeared, and, in 2019, there were only two families who still speak Bulgarian in village of Karchishta. The people of Bulgarian descent have migrated to the inner parts of Albania, most of them to Tirana, but also to the Republic of North Macedonia.

From the data in Table 14, it is evident that people of Bulgarian descent in Albania live in 33 settlements at the present time. Besides them, there are also several self-dependent settlements, for example Nakamen and Zaborye, whose population has not been registered independently by the Albanian Institute of Statistics. These settlements are administratively parts of the village of Ostreni. The people of Bulgarian descent in the village Sebishta, which has a mixed population, are relatively territorially isolated. The river that runs through the village separates the two communities. The population that has Bulgarian as a mother tongue lives in five hamlets: Karadzha, Kalichi, Ndreu, Bala, and Trampa. The total number of the residents of Sebishta according to the censuses taken in 2001 and 2011 is known, but, at present, it is difficult to accurately differentiate the representatives of the two linguistic groups.<sup>32</sup> This is valid for all people of Bulgarian descent, living in their historic places that at the present time are settlements with mixed ethnicities, and because of this, they cannot be statistically identified.

The number of residents of the villages with a compact population of Bulgarian descent according to the census taken in 2001 was 16,287 people, and in 2011, it was 11,801 which amounts to a decrease of 27.54%. At the same time, according to the averaged estimate of the communities of the people of Bulgarian descent, the number of their representatives who have migrated to the inner parts of Albania in 2001 was around 34,000, while in 2011, it was around 38,000 people, as this indicator encompasses the living people who migrated after the 1960s, with the second and third generation of children born into these families. This means that if in 1930 around 80% of the Bulgarian community in Albania lived compactly in their historic places, then in 2001 the people of Bulgarian descent living compactly were 32.39%, and in 2011 they were just 23.7%.

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<sup>32</sup> Because of this, the number of residents of the Bulgarian hamlets of the village of Sebishta is estimated approximately, based on the number of inhabited houses and the average household size for the region for the respective years.

This means that due to migration, the bad age structure, but mostly the relatively small number of women of childbearing age, the possibilities for procreation among the people of Bulgarian descent, who still live compactly in their historic settlements, is reduced.

The age structure of the people of Bulgarian descent, who have moved to the larger Albanian cities in the inner parts of Albania, is much better. They, however, do not live compactly, but among the Albanian population. For this reason, the language used within the families of people who have migrated continues to be Bulgarian, but the language on the street, in school and in the state institutions is Albanian. A direct consequence of this fact is a poorer vocabulary of Bulgarian words among those who have migrated, especially among those of a young age. In discussions on current topics, Albanian is used more often. In mixed marriages, especially in nuclear families, in most cases, the Bulgarian language fades away. It must be taken into account that since the field research from 1992 up to the present day among the descendants of those 6,000 Bulgarians, who had migrated to the inner parts of Albania up to 1930, there are practically none who speak Bulgarian as a mother tongue today.

The situation is a little better in mixed marriages within extended families, if the grandfather and the grandmother are of Bulgarian descent. In these cases, the Bulgarian language is often passed on to the new generation. Besides this, a large part of the children in families of people of Bulgarian descent who have migrated, spend their summer vacations with their grandparents in the villages with a compact Bulgarian population. There, they manage to fill in the blanks of their knowledge and usage of Bulgarian.

In the present day migration of the people of Bulgarian descent to the large Albanian cities, as of now, the regional isolation of these communities observed in the 1970s and the 1980s, still remains the same. Communication between the people who migrated is mainly on a regional basis, and the people from Kukës Gora, Gollobordë, and Mala Prespa associate with other people who were born in the same region as them. They associate with representatives of the other two regions very rarely, which shows that the community of the people of Bulgarian descent is not consolidated. Only the leaders of the various Bulgarian organizations associate with each other regularly regardless of their different territorial background.

The present day ethno-religious situation in the regions with a compact population of Bulgarian descent is also of interest. Religion never had

deep roots in Albania, but after 1967 the country was officially proclaimed as atheistic, all religions were forbidden, and most of the churches and mosques were destroyed or were used for some other purpose. Only those designated as cultural monuments were preserved. For this reason, the practice of any faith in most of the cases was on the domestic level, and often, marriages were contracted between people of different religions.

The regions of Kukës Gora and Mala Prespa can be examined as mono-religious. In the former, Islam is predominant, and in the latter Orthodox Christianity. The picture in Gollobordë is significantly more different, where Christianity and Islam have traditionally co-existed. However, the statistical data from 1873 to 1939 show a constant decrease of the Christian population. An identical process is also observed after 1944. According to the data of father Todor Plyaushkov<sup>33</sup>, in 1950, 154 Christian families lived in Gollobordë and Polet, in 1998 they numbered 48, and in 2008 their number was just 17 (Todoroska, 2014). This number, however, must be taken as relative, as many Christians have migrated to the inner parts of Albania, but have kept their properties in the two regions and use them during the summer.

Islam and Christianity in Gollobordë have influenced each other over the years. During field research at the beginning of the 1990s, several indicative examples in this direction were established. In the family with two Muslim parents, several of the children have Christian names. For example, the oldest sister is called Tana (a form of Stoyanka) and she has declared herself as Christian. At the same time, her brother is called Ismet and he is a Muslim. To the question „How did you decide your religious belonging?“ the answer was that the choice was made by the father. The case with the Christian Bayram from the village of Steblevo, born at the end of the 1940s in a family of Eastern Orthodox Christians is interesting. To the question of why he has a Muslim name, he responded that „his mother gave birth several times, but all her kids died as infants. When he was born, it was during the Muslim holiday Bayram and she decided to give him this name“. (Tashev, 2003). The religious interaction can also be observed in the toponymy

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<sup>33</sup> Father Todor Plyaushkov is a typical representative of the group of people with double identity. In contacts with Bulgarian citizens in 1993, he self-identified as a Bulgarian and as such, he was filmed in the documentary „The Bulgarians in Albania“ filmed by the Regional Television Center of Blagoevgrad. At the same time, the Macedonian researcher K. Todoroska presented him as a Macedonian.

of various villages. The village of Golemo Ostreni is an indicative example of this. The area where the mosque is built is called „Na Tsarkov“, meaning „at the church“. According to the local people, the village church in the past was on this exact spot.

Overall, it can be summarized that the Islam practised in the region of Gollobordë is domestic. Several mosques have been built, in which there are no imams and they are empty most of the time. Despite the fact that the number of traditional Christians is decreasing, representatives of both religions celebrate the old holidays together, as one group. Newborn children are given names typical of the both religions, regardless of the religious affiliation of their parents.

### **4.3. Organizations of the Bulgarians in Albania and their activities**

After the democratic changes in Albania, various Bulgarian associations were founded and functioned. As mentioned above, the first organizations were founded based on their members' region of origin and the Bulgarian mother tongue of their members.. Later, the activities of these organizations abated and new organizations were founded in their place, in which the Bulgarian ethnic affiliation of the population in Kukës Gora, Gollobordë, and Mala Prespa is openly stated.

At the present time, six registered Bulgarian organizations exist in Albania. They are engaged in various aspects of researching, defending and popularizing the Bulgarian language and the Bulgarian ethnography of the regions and maintain ample contacts with Bulgaria.

During the celebrations of the Bulgarian National Holiday in Tirana on March 3rd, 1999, the idea for founding the Bulgarian organization **Culture Association „Ivan Vazov“** was born among some of the local Bulgarians. Zehrudin Dokle from the region of Kukës Gora was elected its first president. The organization aspires to unite the Bulgarian community from the three regions with a compact Bulgarian population – Gollobordë, Gora, and Prespa. When registering this organization, the fact that in the new Constitution of Albania the ethnic self-identification is a matter of personal choice, and not something to be recognized by the authorities, as it was before, was taken into account (Milanov, 2016). This allows for the Bulgar-

ian self-consciousness to be expressed freely, without the necessity for the Bulgarian ethnic minority to be officially recognized beforehand. The association tries to encompass the entire Bulgarian community in the country and it has branches in the three main regions with a prevalent population of Bulgarian descent – Mala Prespa, Gollobordë, and Kukës Gora.

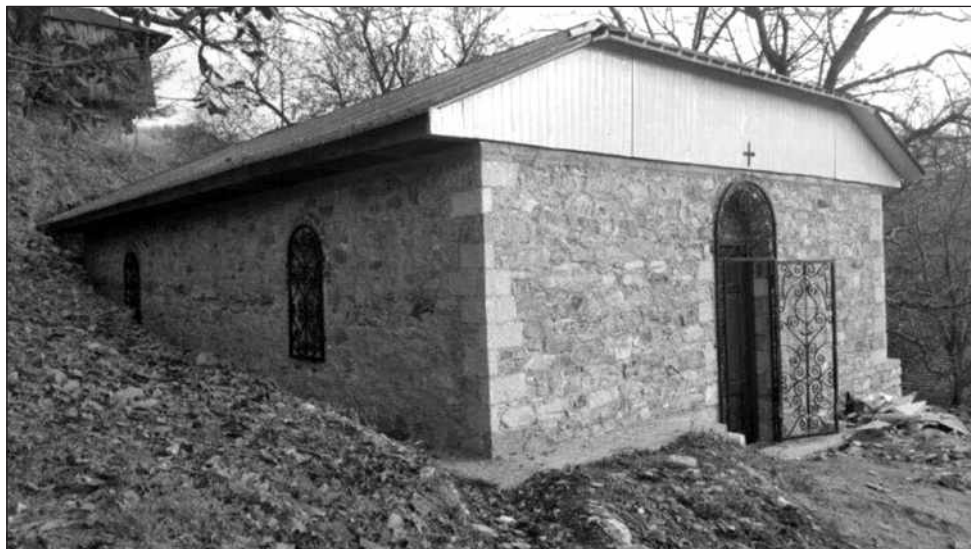
**The Association of the Bulgarians in Albania „Prosperitet Gollobordë“** was founded in 2000, according to Act 2573, Ruling 1306 from 28.04.2000 of the Municipal Court in Tirana as a non-governmental organization. It has branches in the cities of Elbasan, Durrës, Kukës, Berat, Librazhd, Fier, etc. Haxhi Pirushi has been president of the association since 2001. The goals the association has set for itself are to preserve, develop and study Bulgarian customs and traditions in the region of Gollobordë, and also, to assist in the preservation of the identity of the Bulgarians, who have migrated to the inner parts of Albania or abroad. Another cause of the association is to fight and counteract both assimilation and anti-Bulgarian propaganda in Albania. The association acts to create specific opportunities for the population of Gollobordë for spiritual, economic, cultural, and educational prosperity and to maintain contacts between the citizens of Gollobordë and Bulgaria.

The cultural association „Prosperitet – Gollobordë“ assists in setting up training courses for university applicants and Sunday schools for learning Bulgarian. The Bulgarian Sunday school „Hristo Botev“, founded in 2015 and financed by the national program „My Language and Culture Abroad“ of the Ministry of Education and Science in Sofia. The head office and resources of the association are located in its in Tirana. Thanks to this activity, as of 2019, it has helped over 1,000 students and university applicants.

The president of the association, H. Pirushi, also initiated the reconstruction of the Orthodox church of „Saint Nicholas“ in the village of Ginovec in 2004. In 2016, the church of „St. Nicholas“ in the village of Steblevo, built 300 years ago and destroyed during the atheist regime of Enver Hoxha, was also restored.

The association takes part in various cultural manifestations in Bulgaria. For example, they took part in the 8<sup>th</sup> National Bulgarian Folk Arts Fair for Bulgarian folklore performers living outside of the Republic of Bulgaria, in „Koprivshitsa 2000“, in the National Folklore Fair „Rozhen 2000“ and others. It also assists in the visits of Bulgarian performers to the region of Gollobordë.





*Church of „Saint Nicholas“ in the village of Steblevo, restored by the association „Prosperitet – Gollobordë“.*

*Photo: Haxhi Pirushi*

In the past few years, the cultural association „Prosperitet – Gollobordë“ has also promoted the idea of creating a Bulgarian cultural and information center and a Bulgarian college in Tirana.

Besides this, the association wants to contribute to the solidification of the universal connections between the Albanian and Bulgarian peoples.

In 2003, the association „Prosperitet Gollobordë“ referred the matter of the Bulgarians in Albania to the Council of Europe and requested the legalization of their status as a national minority. Due to the increased interest in the work of the association, its president H. Pirushi was interviewed several times by the German television ZDF and the Italian networks RAI, RAI 1, and RAI 2.

Because of their openly expressed Bulgarian self-consciousness, the members of the association „Prosperitet – Gollobordë“ are criticized in the Albanian press. For example, R. Hoxha accused the association of manipulating “the national and patriotic feelings of the people of Gollobordë in exchange for personal gains... This association has turned into a state within the state by issuing certificates, on the basis of which people receive Bulgarian citizenship and a passport, as well as scholarships to con-

tinue their university education in Bulgaria. This privilege is given only to people from Gollobordë or their relatives, who are married to people from Gollobordë, all of whom are considered as a part of the Bulgarian minority in Albania by the Bulgarian Government „ (Hoxha, 2017).

The **Association „The Bulgarians in Albania“** was founded in 2011. At that time, Gezim Kurti was elected as its president, and Arben Sokoli as secretary. At the present time, the president is Ahmed Bala. The association tries to preserve the national identity of the Bulgarian population in Albania, to popularize Bulgarian folk arts and culture among the Albanian public. A primary aspect of the activities of the organization is to identify the Bulgarians who have left their birth places. For this reason, it is active on the territory of the entire country – Tirana, Durrës, Vlora, Sarandë, Berat, Lushnjë, Kavajë, Kukës and other cities. It has developed projects for opening Bulgarian Sunday schools outside of the capital, for the reconstruction of the school in the village of Shishtavec in Kukës Gora and converting it into a multifunctional social center for the benefit of the entire Bulgarian community in the area. The association also assists Bulgarian scholars in their research in Albania.

**Association for Bulgarian-Albanian friendship** was founded on November 11th, 2015, in the city of Korçë. Its president is Dimitar Pandovski. He is the son of the distinguished Bulgarian patriot from the village of Vrabnik, Nikola Pandovski – one of the initiators of the letter sent to the Bulgarian Tsaritsa Giovanna in 1939, with the request to speak on their behalf to the Italian authorities, so that the usage of the Bulgarian language would be allowed in their schools and churches. Vice President is Ervis Taljuri. The main activities of the Association for Bulgarian-Albanian Friendship are cultural, educational and informational. It has set for itself the goal of preserving the national identity of the Bulgarians in Albania, and this is inseparably connected to its active participation in initiatives for defending basic human rights. Among the set goals are also encouraging cooperation between Albania and Bulgaria in the areas of economy, education, culture, environment, agriculture, science, tourism, sports, publications, and others.

The Association for Bulgarian-Albanian Friendship regularly organizes festivities in Korçë for the national holiday of Bulgaria on March 3rd and for the Day of Bulgarian Literature and Culture on May 24th. Its representatives also participate in the meetings of the Committee for the

Policy for the Bulgarians Abroad at the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, dedicated to the specifics and problems of the Bulgarian communities in the Republic of Albania and the Republic of Kosovo.

The association maintains the Bulgarian Sunday school „Saints Cyril and Methodius“ with one class in Korçë and one in Bilishta, where every year between 50 and 60 students study Bulgarian. It also assists in implementing university application campaigns among the Bulgarians in the region of Korçë for university education in Bulgaria. For the younger Bulgarians, the art competition „With Bulgaria in Our Hearts“ in 2016 was held. The Association for Bulgarian-Albanian Friendship has participated in seminars, organized by Foundation „Bulgarian Memory“ for several years now. With its support, the association created and equipped a room for studying the Bulgarian language in the local school in Bilishta.

The **Association „Preservation of Ethno-cultural Traditions of the Bulgarians in Albania“** was founded in 2015. The goals set by the association are the preservation and the popularization of Bulgarian traditions and customs, including the encouragement and popularization of the educational and cultural cooperation between Bulgaria and Albania. The



*A moment during the visit of the Vice President of the Republic of Bulgaria Iliana Yotova to Kukës Gora, Albania, in 2017 and her meetings with the local Bulgarian community*

*Photo: Fisnik Hoxha*

association regularly takes part in the activities organized by the Bulgarian Diplomatic Mission in Tirana. Its representatives have also participated in several meetings of the Committee for the Policy for the Bulgarians Abroad at the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, discussing current matters concerning the Bulgarians in Albania.

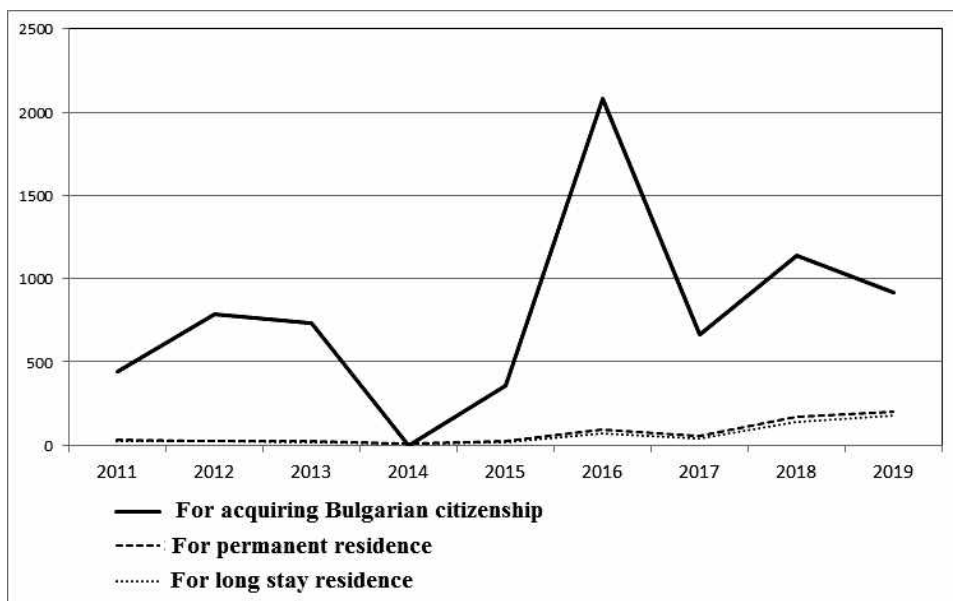
The **Association „Our Gora“** was founded in 2017. Its president is Fisnik Hoxha. The association actively participates in the coordination of activities with the other Bulgarian organizations in Albania for the recognition the Bulgarian minority in Albania. It took part in the debates in the Parliamentary Committee for discussing and adopting the Law on the Minorities in Albania. For the same reason, the association took part in a TV debate on the largest private Albanian television channel, Top Channel, about the preservation of the Bulgarian minority. In November of 2017, the association „Our Gora“ actively participated in the organization of the visit of the Vice President of the Republic of Bulgaria, Iliana Yotova, to Kukës Gora. In the last few years, the association has organised charity campaigns for the schools in Gora. It also assists with the organization and administration of the examinations of university applicants of Bulgarian descent from Gora that wish to continue their higher education in Bulgaria.

#### **4.4. Bulgarians in Albania and their contacts with Bulgaria**

After 1991, people of Bulgarian descent in Albania began to seek more contacts with Bulgaria. An increased interest in staying in Bulgaria, studying in Bulgarian universities or acquiring Bulgarian citizenship based on Bulgarian descent can be observed.

When initiating procedures for accomplishing some of these goals, the Bulgarians from Albania first address the state Agency for Bulgarians Abroad, which issues them official documents, certifying their Bulgarian descent. In the middle of 2010, a digital register for the issuance of certificates was introduced in the Agency for Bulgarians Abroad. An administrative report shows that for the period between 2011 and 2019, a total of 8,351 certificates for Bulgarian descent were issued to Bulgarians from Albania (Figure 1).

The number of the certificates intended for the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Bulgaria for acquiring Bulgarian citizenship on the premise of Bulgarian descent was the largest: 7,112. During the same period, 634 certificates for Bulgarians from Albania for permanent stay (initially for



**Figure 1.** Certificates by type issued between 2011 and 2019 by the Agency for Bulgarians Abroad, attesting to the Bulgarian descent of Bulgarians from Albania for the purpose of acquiring Bulgarian citizenship, permitting permanent stay on the territory of Bulgaria or allowing long-term residence.

**Source:** Administrative report of the Agency for Bulgarians Abroad (2020)

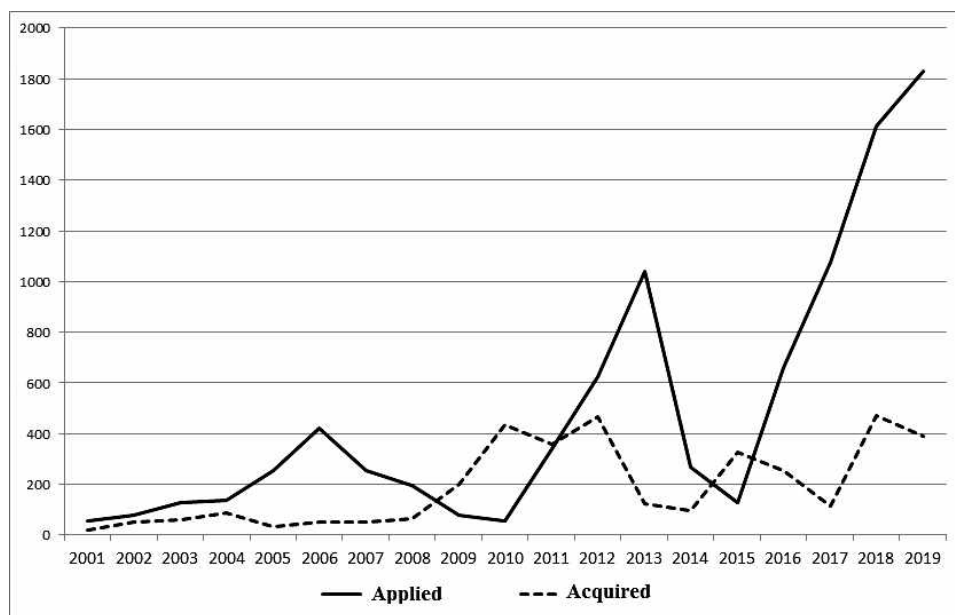
5 years with the option to be renewed after a submitted application) were also issued, as well as 502 for long-term residence (for a period of up to one year) in Bulgaria.

In Figure 1, the small number of certificates issued in 2014 is notable. This problem is related to the investigations of the Supreme Administrative Prosecutor's Office and the Chief Inspectorate at the Council of Ministers and the problems that they found in the procedures for certifying Bulgarian descent by the Agency for Bulgarians Abroad. In 2018, a new corruption scandal affected the Agency for Bulgarians Abroad, which led to another decrease in the number of the certificates issued. Despite that, the problem with the certification of people the Bulgarian descent has not been completely resolved. At the moment, the Agency for Bulgarians Abroad continues its work and assists in the contacts between the Bulgarian communities abroad, including the Bulgarians in Albania, and Bulgaria.

Most of the certificates for Bulgarian descent issued by the Agency for Bulgarians Abroad are used as documents for initiating the procedures of acquiring Bulgarian citizenship at the Ministry of Justice. Official digital statistics from the Directorate of Bulgarian Citizenship at the Ministry of Justice have been maintained since 2001. The administrative report shows that, for the period 2001 – 2019, 9,235 people from Albania have applied for Bulgarian citizenship, and 3,656 have acquired it based on declared Bulgarian descent (Figure 2).

This means that at the end of 2019, around 18.5% of the people of Bulgarian descent in Albania have applied for Bulgarian citizenship and 7.3% have already acquired it.

In the past few years, the goals of various people applying for Bulgarian citizenship is periodically debated by the Bulgarian community. Questions are being raised whether their motives are selfish for the purpose of travel and work in other member states of the European Union, whether it is a good idea for those who acquire Bulgarian citizenship to be obliged to stay for a certain period of time on the territory of the Republic of Bul-



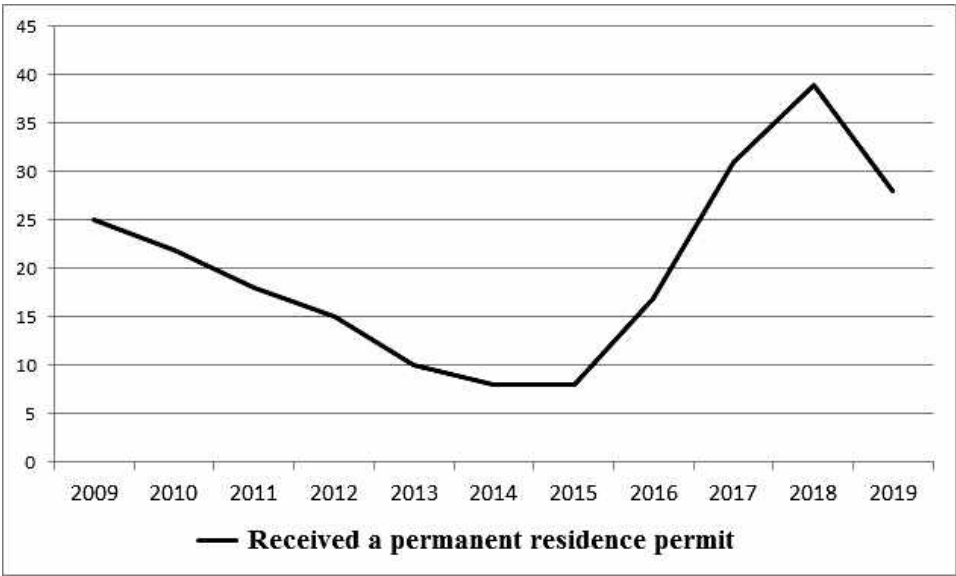
**Figure 2.** Number of Bulgarians from Albania who applied for or acquired Bulgarian citizenship on the basis of Bulgarian descent for the period 2001 – 2019.

**Source:** Administrative report of the Ministry of Justice (2020)



garia and so on. In this direction, some interesting information was made public by R. Hoxha, who, having his Albanian national beliefs, is opposed to the idea of Albanian citizens being granted Bulgarian citizenship. In the Albanian media, he has stated that „the practice of issuing Bulgarian passports (to the Bulgarians in Albania, Ed.) is carried out by the Ministry of the Interior of Bulgaria by falsely registering these people as residents of Sofia or of any other Bulgarian city. “You are registering them with fake addresses, while, at the same time, they reside in Albania“ (Hoxha, 2017). By such a statement, he makes his contention that the acquisition of Bulgarian citizenship is for selfish reasons pointless and shows that a large part of the Bulgarians in Albania do not move to other member states of the European Union after they acquire Bulgarian citizenship and remain in their country of origin.

Figure 3 shows the data of the Ministry of Interior about the number of the Albanian citizens of Bulgarian descent, who were granted permission for permanent residency on the territory of Bulgaria for the 11-year period:



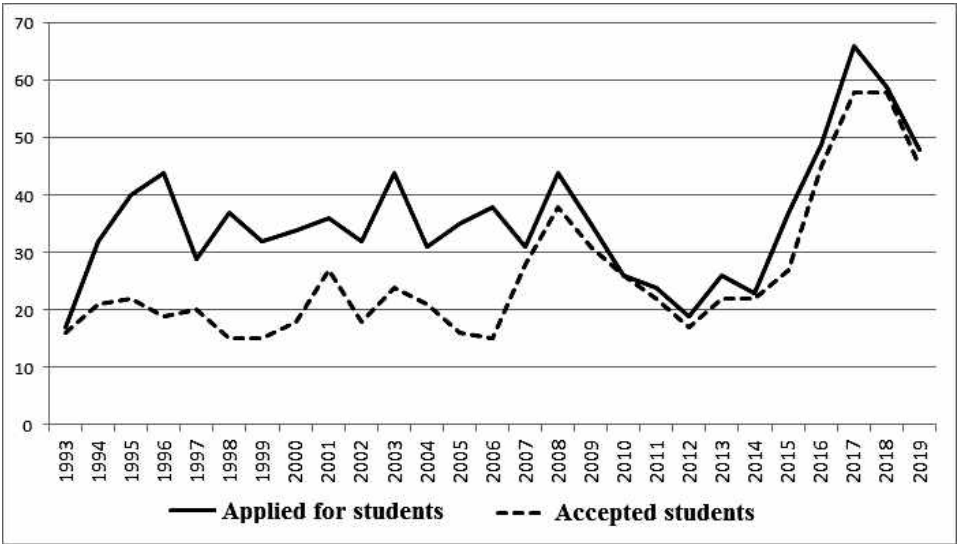
**Figure 3.** Number of Albanian citizens of Bulgarian descent, who were granted permission for permanent residency in Bulgaria for the period 2009 – 2019.

**Source:** Administrative report of the Ministry of Interior (2020)

The total number of the Bulgarians from Albania, who were granted permission for permanent residency on the territory of Bulgaria for the period 2009 – 2019 is 325 people.

Another area, where a growing interest by Bulgarians from Albania is observed, is education in Bulgarian universities. The policy that the Ministry of Education and Sciences (MES) in the field of higher education for the Bulgarians in Albania is based on Ordinance 103 of the Council of Ministers from May 31st, 1993, for the realization of educational activity by Republic of Bulgaria for foreign citizens and people without citizenship, who are of Bulgarian nationality. For the period 1993 – 2019, 968 Bulgarians from Albania applied for education in Bulgarian universities and 706 of them were accepted (Figure 4).

Besides this, the interest of Bulgarians from Albania for residencies and doctoral studies in Bulgaria has also increased. During the period between 1996 and 2019, 46 PhD applicants and 17 residency applicants from Albania, all of Bulgarian descent, have been accepted in Bulgaria. Those who finish their education in Bulgaria develop successful careers as teach-



**Figure 4.** University applicants and accepted applicants who are Bulgarians from Albania for the period 1993 – 2019.

**Source:** Almanac Patriot (2018) and the administrative report from the Ministry of Education and Sciences (2020)

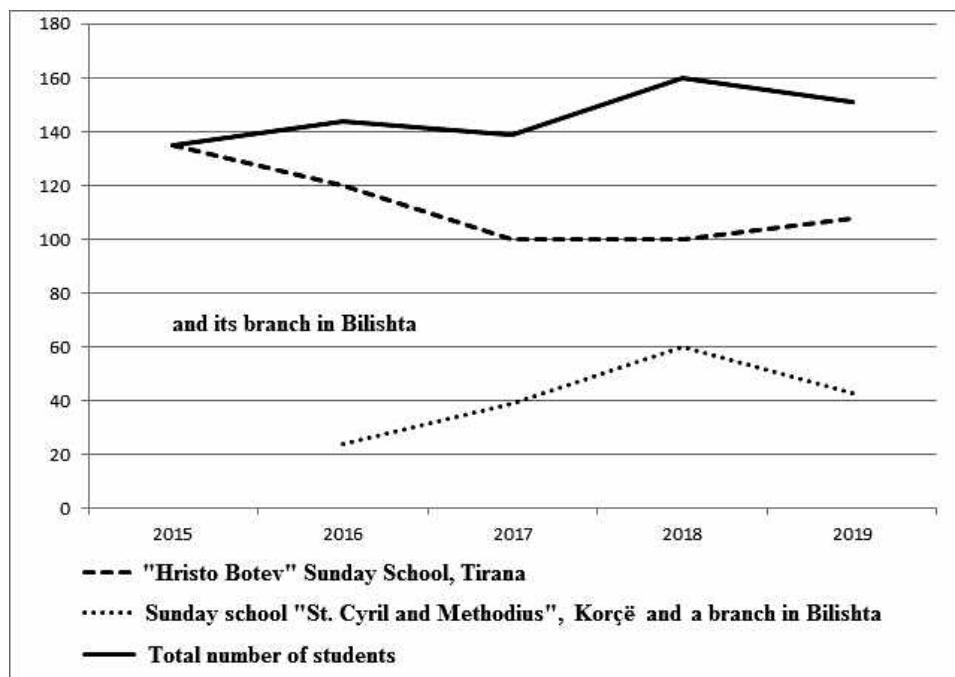
ers, university professors, journalists, ministerial servants, in banking, and state administration after they return to Albania.

More and more children of Bulgarian descent in Albania of a young age realize that based on the archaic Bulgarian dialect that they speak, they can easily learn the modern literary Bulgarian language, which would make their contacts with Bulgaria easier, and provide them with possibilities for realizing this. For this reason, they take advantage of the opportunities that the national programme „Mother Tongue and Culture Abroad“ of the Ministry of Education and Sciences of the Republic of Bulgaria, which offers them the opportunity of studying in Bulgarian Sunday schools. The programme itself is directed at Bulgarians abroad and is related to the efforts of the Bulgarian state to preserve the Bulgarian ethno-cultural space and uniqueness of the Bulgarian communities abroad.

The Bulgarian Sunday schools stimulate the study of Bulgarian language and the literature, history and geography of Bulgaria by the Bulgarians abroad, but also aid in the preservation of the national self-consciousness, lifestyle and culture. This allows for the successful integration of the Bulgarian children from abroad into the Bulgarian educational system if eventually they come to study in Bulgaria or possible future employment in Bulgaria, for example, working in branches of Bulgarian companies abroad, developing partner programmes with Bulgarian institution, etc.

Interest in the Bulgarian Sunday schools in Albania is evident by the fact that when the first Bulgarian school in Tirana opened on October 15th, 2015, at the beginning of the school year, there were 66 students from 1st to 4th grades and 38 university applicants. Due to the constant enrollment of new students, at the end of the last school year, 87 students and 52 university applicants successfully graduated.

Figure 5 presents the data from an administrative report of the Ministry of Education and Sciences about the number of students of Bulgarian descent, who studied in the Bulgarian Sunday schools in Albania:



**Figure 5.** Number of students of Bulgarian descent, who studied in the Bulgarian Sunday schools in Albania for the period 2015 – 2019.

**Source:** Administrative report of the Ministry of Education and Sciences (2020)

According to this data, for the period 2015 – 2019, 563 students in total studied in the Bulgarian Sunday school „Hristo Botev“ in Tirana. For the period 2016 – 2019, 166 students total studied in the Bulgarian Sunday school „Saints Cyril and Methodius“ in Korçë and its branch in Bilishta. The total number of the Bulgarian students in Albania for the period 2015 – 2019 was 729.

After 2007, the National Associations of Representatives of City Councils in the Republic of Bulgaria participated actively in the efforts of the Bulgarians in Albania for the foundation of a Bulgarian college in Tirana. For this purpose, the foundation „Zemlyatsi“ was founded. It set a goal for itself to raise funds for the construction of a Bulgarian high school. Within the framework of this activity, the municipality of Mezdra was twinned with the Gollobordë village of Golemo Ostreni (that was a

municipal center up to 2014). Since 2012, there have been several visits of mayors from villages in Gollobordë to Bulgaria, and also several visits to Albania by mayors of municipalities in Bulgaria.

In their contacts with Bulgarian institutions and Bulgarian citizens, the Bulgarians in Albania are also assisted by various Bulgarian non-governmental organizations, foundations and others. Among them, the Association for Connections with the Bulgarians in Albania and Kosovo „Ognishte“ stands out. Since its foundation in 1999, it has set up 15 round tables, in which there have always been representatives of the Bulgarians in Albania.

The foundation „Bulgarian Memory“ also assists in the contacts and exchange of visits of folklore and student groups. It has organized a series of seminars, whose focus is to encourage the connections between the young Bulgarians abroad. During these activities, Bulgarians from Albania also participate regularly, and they get acquainted with current topics such as innovation, progress and the digital world, career orientation for professions of the future and the implementation of educational initiatives for integration and socialization of the Bulgarian communities of our historic diaspora.

In 2019, the village of Vrabnik received an especially significant support from Bulgaria. With the assistance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Sofia, a project to construct an asphalt road between the city of Bilishta and Vrabnik was initiated. At the moment, this is the biggest project that Bulgaria has funded in the context of bilateral relations, and its total value is 1,125,000 leva. (BTV news, 2019).

At the beginning of 2020, the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Bulgaria in the Republic of Albania, Momchil Raychevski, and Banush Koçi, the principal of the school „Elez Koçi“ in the village of Golemo Ostreni, signed an agreement for a grant for the realization of the project „Equipment for an IT classroom“. By setting up a modern computer cabinet, Bulgaria helps the improvement of the education of 320 students from the region of Gollobordë, who study in the school in Golemo Ostreni. The project is funded via official channels for aid and development and its purpose is to improve the modernization of the educational process, as well as to raise the qualifications of the teachers (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

The Bulgarians in Albania are one of the oldest communities outside the borders of present day Bulgaria. This community was formed as early as the foundation of the Bulgarian state in the Balkans. The efforts of the Bulgarian Governments for their official recognition as a minority began in 1913, when Albania was liberated from Ottoman rule. The diplomatic actions of Bulgaria in support of the Albanian Bulgarians continued intermittently for more than a 100 years and only in 2017 did the authorities in Tirana officially recognize the Bulgarians on their territory as a minority group.

The reasons for this slow and difficult achievement are complex. After 1913, newly liberated Albania was defenceless and was under the influence of its neighbouring states – Serbia (later Yugoslavia) and Greece, as well as the Great Powers. Especially significant is the pressure from the authorities in Belgrade, who consistently defended their position of not granting minority rights to the Bulgarians in Albania. Influence was also applied by the incoherent and at times timid Bulgarian policy, especially after 1934 and on the eve of World War II. After 1941, the main attention of Bulgarian authorities was directed at the problems of the Bulgarians in the western parts of Vardar Macedonia, due to which the fate of the Bulgarians within the internationally recognised borders of Albania was relegated to the background.

After 1944, Bulgaria, Albania and Yugoslavia formed a complex geopolitical triangle and their relations were heavily influenced by ideology, including the spreading of Comintern Macedonism. After withstanding the danger of Yugoslavia annexing Albania in 1948 and despite the Albanian-Yugoslav tension, Enver Hoxha tried to secure maximum rights for the Albanian population under the control of Belgrade, and because of this as „reciprocity,“ he gave rights to the so called Macedonian minority in Albania. In this process, Bulgaria exhibited passivity and was not able to take advantage of the opportunities which arose in 1948, 1955, and 1983 for the introduction of the Bulgarian literary language in „the Macedonian“ schools in Albania. Despite this, during the period between 1949 and 1991, the people of Bulgarian descent in Mala Prespa and the village of Vrabnik did not study the Skopjan literary norm, but the local Prespa Bulgarian dialect, written with the Bulgarian alphabet.



After the democratic changes at the beginning of the 1990s, the newly independent Republic of North Macedonia returned to the model of „reciprocity“ and by taking into account the interest of Tirana in the large Albanian community on their territory, once again tried to raise the question of the „Macedonians“ in Albania. However, the success of Skopje was only partial, as minority rights were requested and granted to only 5,000 people from the region of Mala Prespa, who continue to be registered as Macedonians.

At the same time, the Albanian authorities had to consider the historical facts and the necessity of following international standards, including the principles laid down in the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. The people of Bulgarian descent who had preserved their Bulgarian self-consciousness mobilized and collected 4,500 signatures for the request to be officially recognized as a national minority. This process found support in the position of the Bulgarian authorities that was consistent with a democratic approach – the past of this population in Albania, whose mother tongue is part of the group of Slavic languages, should not be falsified, and its representatives should decide for themselves who they are and have the right to freely identify their nationality.

The recognition of the Bulgarian national minority in Albania in 2017 did not solve the main problems of the Bulgarian community there, but only created mechanisms for their resolution. While at the beginning of the 1930s, 91.33% of the Bulgarians compactly inhabited their historic settlements, today the most important change is that due to mass migration after 1991, only 20% of the people of Bulgarian descent have remained in their traditional historical and geographical areas, where the archaic form of Bulgarian language that they speak is passed on from generation to generation without problems. Today, most of the Albanian Bulgarians are in a foreign language environment and despite the fact that, in most of the families who emigrated, the Bulgarian language is still in use on the domestic level, communication in Albanian is used on the street, in school and in the state institutions. This state of affairs leads to the impoverishment of the language and limits its usage.

This fact must be taken into account when developing educational policies for this community and circumstances should be created that would allow children of school age to study in Bulgarian. It is obvious that the existing Bulgarian Sunday schools are not enough. The initiative

of the Bulgarians in Albania for founding a Bulgarian college should find its realization. For this reason, the president of the Association „Prosperitet Gollobordë,“ H. Pirushi, says that this idea is strategic for the Bulgarians in Albania. His motives are that „our population in Albania is leaving the regions and moving to the large cities – Tirana, Durrës. With the relocation of the families out of the regions, the language also disappears. Our people have always known how to speak Bulgarian, but gradually this ability is being lost. We have presented this idea to every Bulgarian Government. For now, there has been little support from the government in Bulgaria“.

Such an opinion is also shared by Ahmet Bala, president of the association „The Bulgarians in Albania“. According to him, „at the moment, I am trying to find Bulgarians that can speak Bulgarian and it is really difficult, because many of the young graduate and don't want to remain here. The young people leave their historical and geographic areas, inhabited by Bulgarians, to seek opportunities in larger cities and this makes identifying them as an ethnic group and estimating their exact number very difficult. Because of this, difficulties also stem with the organization of Bulgarian schools or courses to study Bulgarian, that have to be set up exactly in the regions with most compact Bulgarian population. There are now programs in Bulgarian on the Albanian television. This is delightful, but it is not enough“ (Mançeva, 2019).

In 2019, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Embassy of Bulgaria in Tirana promoted the idea for Bulgarian teachers to be sent to these Albanian regions that are inhabited by the Bulgarian national minority. This approach, however, has to be organized according to the current demographic state of the Bulgarian community and, most of all, according to the territorial distribution of the people of student age. Besides this, the cooperation of over 700 representatives of the local Bulgarian intellectuals, who graduated from Bulgarian universities after 1993 and speak the modern version of the Bulgarian literary language, can be relied on.

The question that was raised back in 2008 about the creation of a cultural information center of Bulgaria in Tirana and a cultural information center of Albania in Sofia still remains unanswered. Despite that, such an agreement was signed in Tirana and was adopted with Decision 50 from January 30th, 2009, by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, and entered into force on March 31st, 2011, the Bulgarian community in Albania is still waiting for a Bulgarian cultural center to be opened.

The appeal of the local population and the efforts of the mayors of the villages in Kukës Gora and Gollobordë for separating the two regions as independent administrative units by the example of Mala Prespa should be aided on international and European levels. Only in this way can the compact Bulgarian communities take advantage of the opportunities of self-governance.

Also, problems in the work of the Bulgarian state administration for determining the origins of the Bulgarians from Albania, which are periodically exhibited, have to be resolved conclusively and based on scientific principles. At the moment, this situation is unfortunately manifested by the Ministry of Justice, where candidates for Bulgarian citizenship are sometimes refused, with the reason that there is no indisputable evidence for their Bulgarian descent. This attitude reveals a lack of information about the processes among the Bulgarians in Albania in its recent past and its current state.

The research tracing the ethno-demographic processes among the people of Bulgarian descent in Albania has undeniably established that at present time, they live compactly in 33 settlements. Since 1939, when the Bulgarian authorities recognized the residents of these villages as Bulgarians, the process of emigration (moving out), has been observed only but not the process of immigration (moving in). For this reason, all the people, born in the 33 settlements in question, are of Bulgarian descent and their mother tongue is an archaic Bulgarian dialect. Submitting a birth certificate, attesting that someone was born in one of these villages, indisputably confirms the Bulgarian descent of its owner. As the majority of Bulgarians who have migrated to the inner parts of Albania also originate from these villages, there is no problem for their Bulgarian origins to be verified, as well by proving the family connection to an ancestor who was born in one of the villages.

In this regard, difficulties can arise for determining the Bulgarian descent of people, originating from the villages Drenovo and Boboshtica, the region of Korçë, the village of Lin, the region of Ohrid, the village of Sebishta in Gollobordë, and from the villages in Polet. In these settlements, the population today is ethnically mixed or the Bulgarians have completely moved out, but their descendants still live in Albania and some of them still speak Bulgarian in their homes. These cases should be approached individually, according to the specifics of each settlement.

Since the de-Bulgarization of Drenovo and Boboshtica happened in the 1960s, submitting a document that proves a family connection with an ancestor born in these villages before 1960 can serve as a sufficient proof when determining the Bulgarian descent of any of the descendants.

The approach in the cases of people who originate from the village of Lin should be identical. However, for this village the document must be issued before the 1940s, and the ancestor should have a Christian name. This is due to the fact that the Bulgarians in Lin were only Christians, who lived together with Albanian Muslims.

It is significantly more complicated to determine the Bulgarian descent of people who originate from the villages Karchishta, Makelari, Oboki, and Urbele in the region of Poletto and the village of Sebishta in Gollobordë. In Poletto, the Bulgarians of both faiths began to move out right after the Balkan Wars and today there are only a handful left in the village of Karchishta. In place of the Bulgarians who moved out, Albanians have settled and for this reason submitting relatively new birth certificates cannot be accepted as proof of Bulgarian descent. Even if there are baptismal certificates were issued by the Bulgarian Exarchate and are preserved somewhere, it is practically impossible to determine a family connection with an ancestor born there because of the administrative change of surnames. In such cases, objective criteria can be the command of the Bulgarian language. Those who have moved out of Poletto into the inner parts of Albania regularly organize family meetings, visit their home villages for holidays and keep their archaic Bulgarian language and traditions. Encouraging these people to create their own organization, based on this region, can also be used when determining their Bulgarian descent.

As for the village of Sebishta in Gollobordë, at the present time, the population is also mixed in regards to the language they speak, albeit separated by hamlets. A birth certificate cannot conclusively determine the descent of its owner. A good command of Bulgarian and information from organizations based on region can also be two factors to conclusively determine the Bulgarian descent of people that originate from similar villages with a mixed population. However, it must be taken into account that such cases apply to a very small part of the present day community of the people of Bulgarian descent in Albania.

Bulgaria must find a permanent solution to the problem of determining Bulgarian descent, because the practice of rejection by the Bulgarian

state administration, of denial based on the lack of „irrefutable“ proof, causes disappointment and demotivation among the Bulgarians in Albania. The Macedonist formations in Albania target precisely this type of person even today, with an active campaign, with the motto „Keep your head up – make it clear that you are Macedonian“. Regarding this matter, the president of the Association „Ilinden“ in Tirana Nikola Gjurgjaj stated: „We want to raise the spirit among the Macedonians to make it clear that they are what they are and nothing else – Macedonians. We are found all throughout Albania. We are primarily concentrated in the regions Mala Prespa, Gora, Gollobordë, but tens of thousands of us are also in Tirana, Elbasan, Durrës, Korçë, and other cities“ (Republic, 2019). This example clearly shows that the Macedonist groups are not willing to accept the Bulgarian position towards the representatives of the population in Albania, whose mother tongue is part of the Slavic language group: This population should decide who they are for themselves.

When forming and conducting Bulgarian state policy for the Bulgarians in Albania, another important question must be resolved. Some politicians and state employees in Bulgaria are trying to impose their idea that Bulgarian citizenship must be granted to people of Bulgarian descent living abroad only if they settle permanently in Bulgaria. This kind of idea does not have an analogue in the policy of the other member states of the European Union that have large historically formed communities living outside of their borders. Such an approach has also not met with support by the Albanian Bulgarians, who have lived in these lands since time of the First Bulgarian Empire. In regards to this, the president of the Association „Prosperitet – Gollobordë“, H. Pirushi, stated: „We, the Bulgarians in Albania do not wish to move to Bulgaria. We wish to be recognized as Bulgarians, but to work where we live in Albania, where the lands of our ancestors have been for generations. A lot of things can be done by this country and Bulgaria. In our region, there are conditions for winter tourism and a lot of things can be done in this direction. If Bulgarian business comes here, Bulgaria will gain a lot. It will have economic gain too, but much more importantly, it will help the Bulgarians here. It will be good for us and it will be good for Bulgaria“.

Given the demographic problems in Bulgaria and the need for a workforce for the Bulgarian economy, a mechanism must be developed that would optimally combine the different aspects of the Bulgarian na-

tional interests and the interests of the Bulgarians in Albania. Of course, Bulgaria should be open for its compatriots in Albania at any time, but not pressure them to settle permanently on our territory.

One such pragmatic approach is to encourage seasonal and other types of short-term migration for work. The model of working abroad is deeply rooted among the Bulgarians in Albania. At the moment, besides internal migration, seasonal migration is also clearly observed – mainly to Greece, Italy, and the Republic of North Macedonia, but also to other countries as well. The Bulgarians in Albania possess good construction, agricultural and culinary skills. Some of the young Bulgarians are well educated. Even with the command of an archaic Bulgarian language, they could successfully find temporary or seasonal jobs and stimulate the Bulgarian economy, without having to leave their historical lands forever. This type of population movement can be made easier by the construction of Pan-European Corridor VIII that would connect the Adriatic Sea to the Black Sea through Albania, the Republic of North Macedonia, and Bulgaria. Launching a new airline route Sofia – Tirana can somewhat compensate for the delay of this important regional project.

Beside the above mentioned, the Albanian Bulgarians, who have graduated in Bulgaria or from the Bulgarian Sunday schools, can find their professional realization with Bulgarian companies that invest in Albania, in Bulgarian commercial agencies or in Albanian companies that seek partnership with Bulgaria. In this way, the Bulgarians in Albania will play an even larger role in the cooperation between the two countries. Especially important is the fact that by implementing such a policy, Bulgaria will not aid the process of de-Bulgarization of these lands, and that has to be our strategic goal, but at the same time, it will improve the financial situation of the Bulgarians in Albania.

For the purpose of promoting the cause of the Albanian Bulgarians and forming a spiritual union with them, various information campaigns should be conducted in Bulgaria and in Albania and October 13th, the date on which in 2017 our compatriots were officially recognized as a national minority, can be proclaimed as “Bulgarians in Albania Day”.



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## **PERSONAL ARCHIVE OF S. TASHEV**

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## APPENDICES

*Table 1*

**Statistics of the Bulgarian male population according to the payment register for 1873 for the military tax (bedel-i askeri) in some of the settlements that became part of Albania after 1913**

Kaza	Settlement	Houses	Bulgarians		Albanians
			Christians	Muslims	
Ohrid	Lin	65	90	-	62
Kostur	Vrabnik	86	220	-	-
Debar	Poleta region				
	Makelari	120	222	134	-
	Gorno Karchishta	30	104	-	-
	Dolno Karchishta	80	76	140	-
	Oboki	50	129	58	-
	Urbele	110	126	174	-
	Deolyani	40	94	53	-
	Gollobordë region				
	Trebishte	965	1030	1350	-
	Ginovec	90	134	118	-
	Klenjë	100	196	120	-
	Stebievo	150	170	200	-
	(Golemo) Ostreni	163	108	315	-
	Vorbica	30	97	-	-
	Vladimerica	17	0	42	-
	Malo Ostreni	90	103	155	-
	Pasynky	20	56	12	-
	Radovesh	35	54	52	-
	Tuchepi	20	32	18	-
	Leshnichan	25	0	54	-
	Smolnik	15	0	33	-
TOTAL		2301	3041	3028	62
			5982		

**Source:** Etnographie des Vilayets d'Adrinople, de Monastir et de Salonique (1878)

Table 2

**Statistics of the Bulgarian population for the period 1894 – 1897 in some of the settlements of the Bitola vilayet that became part of Albania after 1913**

Kaza	Settlement	Bulgarians		Albanians	Other
		Christians	Muslims		
Bitola	Mala Prespa region				
	Gorna Gorica	285	-	-	-
	Dolna Gorica	42	-	-	-
	Glombochani	248	-	-	-
	Shulin	270	-	-	-
	Pustec	410	-	-	-
	Leska	70	-	-	-
	Zarnovsko	250	-	-	-
	Cerye	120	-	-	-
	Tuminec	360	-	-	-
Debar	Gollobordë region				
	Vorbica	300	-	-	-
	Trebishte	70	2500	-	-
	Ginovec	210	-	-	-
	Klenjë	240	230	-	-
	Steblevo	380	400	-	-
	Golemo Ostreni	30	500	-	-
	Malo Ostreni	78	400	-	-
	Pasynky	24	-	100	-
	Tuchepi	20	160	-	-
	Radovesh	0	120	-	-
	Leshnichan	0	240	0	0
	Smolnik	0	0	100	0
	Poletto region				
	Makelari	210	240	-	-
	Gorno Karchishta	240	-	-	-
	Dolno Karchishta	-	200	-	-
	Oboki	175	180	-	-
	Urbele	75	125	-	-
	Deolyani	110	-	130	-
Ohrid	Lin	300	-	300	-
Kostur	Vrabnik	600	-	-	-
TOTAL		5117	5295	630	-
		10412			

**Source:** Kanchov, V. Macedonia. Ethnography and statistics (1900)

Table 3

**Statistics of the total number of Bulgarian Christians, students, teachers, and Bulgarian schools in 1902 in some of the settlements of the Bitola vilayet that became part of Albania after 1913**

Kaza	Settlement	Bulgarian Christians	Schools	Teachers	Students
Bitola	Mala Prespa region				
	Shulin	80	-	-	-
	Dolna Gorica	56	-	-	-
	Gorna Gorica	360	-	-	-
	Leska	88	-	-	-
	Total	584	-	-	-
Debar	Poletto region				
	Urbele	224	1	1	37
	Gorno Karchishta	328	1	1	36
	Makelari	144	-	-	-
	Oboki	120	1	1	26
	Deolyani	96	-	-	-
	Total	912	3	3	99
	Gollobordë region				
	Golemo Ostreni	16	-	-	-
	Malo Ostreni	120	-	-	-
	Ginovec	208	-	-	-
	Pasynky	104	-	-	-
	Steblevo	376	1	1	29
	Trebishte	152	-	-	-
	Vorbnica	256	1	1	20
	Total	1232	2	2	49
<b>TOTAL</b>	---	<b>2728</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>148</b>

**Source:** Brancoff, M., D. La Macédoine et sa Population Chrétienne (1905)



Table 4

**Statistics of the total number of Bulgarian Christians, teachers, and students in the Bulgarian schools for the school year 1911-1912 in the settlements that became part of Albania after 1913**

Kaza	Settlement	Bulgarian Christian houses	Bulgarian Christians	Teachers	Students
Kostur	Vrabnik	95	469	2	52
Bitola	Mala Prespa region				
	Cerye	6	54	-	-
	Pustec	65	499	1	30
	Zarnovsko	16	109	-	-
	Leska	8	85	-	-
	Shulin	23	375	1	20
	Glombochani	33	319	1	25
	Dolna Gorica	33	404	1	27
	Gorna Gorica	5	67	-	-
	Tuminec	23	220	1	12
Debar	Poleta region				
	Urbele	38	190	1	15
	Oboki	25	125	1	13
	Makelare	32	160	-	-
	Gorno Karchishta	45	245	1	30
	Deolyani	10	69	-	-
	Gollobordë region				
	Vorbica	37	196	1	18
	Malo Ostreni	12	69	-	-
	Golemo Ostreni	2	10	-	-
	Pasynky	12	56	-	-
	Tuchepi	6	21	-	-
	Trebishta	8	68	-	-
	Klenjë	40	286	1	29
	Ginovec	35	176	1	21
	Steblevo	40	224	1	28
Korçë	Bilishta	20	106	1	13
	Boboshtica	250	1471	-	-
	Drenovo	140	678	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1059</b>	<b>6751</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>333</b>

**Source:** Traychev, G. Prespa (1923) and Traychev, G. Bulgarian settlements in present day Albania (1929)

Table 5

**The number of the population in some of the settlements in Poletë within the internationally recognised borders of Albania according to the Austro-Hungarian census in 1918**

Settlement	Nationality	Urbele	Gorno Karchishta	Makelari	Oboki	Total
Population according to F. Seiner	Albanians	74	23	288	169	554
	Bulgarians	-	14	87	29	130
	Roma	3	-	11	-	14
	Other	136	197	-	72	405
	Total	213	234	386	270	1103
Population after the second processing of the data in 2003**	Albanians	74	24	303	173	574
	Bulgarians	-	16	81	33	130
	Macedonians, corrected to Bulgarians	159	211	1	69	440
	Macedonian Slavs*	-	-	4	28	32
	Roma	3	-	11	-	14
	Total	236	251	400	303	1190

**Source:** Seiner, Fr. Ergebnisse der Volkszählung in Albanien in dem von den österr.-ungar. Truppen 1916-1918 besetzten Gebiete (1922), information from the team from the University of Graz that processed for the second time the data from the census taken in 1918 by the Austro-Hungarian administration in Albania (2003), calculations by the author of this book.

\* The Austro-Hungarian administration stated that when having more detailed interviews when the census forms were filled in, the „Macedonian Slavs“ in question say they are Bulgarians.

\*\* In a second processing of the data from 2003 about the village of Deolyani, no information is presented. According to F. Seiner in 1918 the total number of its residents was 309 people, of whom 259 Albanians, 44 Bulgarians and 6 Roma.

Table 6

**Number of the population in the settlements in Kukës Gora according to the Austro-Hungarian census from 1918**

Settlement	Albanians	Other*	Total
Shishtavec	54	500	554
Oreshek	-	88	88
Orgosta	-	176	176
Borye	-	426	426
Carnolevo	-	132	132
Zapod	3	139	142
Kosharishte	-	64	64
Pakishta	-	127	127
Ochikle	74	-	74
<b>Totals by ethnic belonging</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>1652</b>	<b>1783</b>

**Source:** Seiner, Fr. Ergebnisse der Volkszählung in Albanien in dem von den österr.-ungar. Truppen 1916-1918 besetzten Gebiete (1922). Calculations by the author of this book.

\* This refers to people that the Austro-Hungarian administration registered as „Macedonian Slavs“, but when conducting more detailed interviews when filling the census forms in they said they are Bulgarians.

Table 7

**Number of the population of Mala Prespa and the village of Vrabnik in 1913 and 1920 that in 1924 was conceded by Albania to Greece when correcting the state border**

Settlement	1913			1920		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Vrabnik	229	200	429	179	187	366
Cerye	30	25	55	47	42	89
Pustec	257	206	463	275	240	515
Zarnovsko	60	40	100	55	58	113
Leska	76	27	103	56	57	113
Shulin	199	142	341	223	188	411
Glombochani	173	151	324	162	167	339
Dolna Gorica	227	136	363	33	29	62
Gorna Gorica				246	211	457
Tuminec	112	98	210	131	126	257
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1363</b>	<b>1025</b>	<b>2388</b>	<b>1407</b>	<b>1305</b>	<b>2722</b>

**Source:** Dénombrement des habitants des nouvelles provinces de la Grèce de 1913 (1915), Population du Royaume de Grèce d'après le recensement du 19 décembre 1920 (1925)

Table 8

**The number of population in the villages in the region of Gora who after 1925 were given to Yugoslavia by Albania after the correction of the state border**

Settlement	Number of people by mother tongue			Total
	Serbian or Croatian*	Albanian	Turkish	
Borye	491	1	-	492
Orgosta	373	194	34	601
Shishtevec	305	700	5	1010
TOTAL	1169	895	39	2103

**Source:** Total State Statistics. Definitive results taken on January, 31st 1921 (1932)

\* In this period all people of Bulgarian descent, living on the territory of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenians (later renamed to Yugoslavia), were declared as speaking Serbian.

Table 9

**The number of Bulgarians in Albania, their households and their average size in 1930 according to the reports of Srebre Poppetrov and Dimitar Iliev**

Settlement	Houses	Bulgarians	Albanians	Average household size
Kukës Gora region				
Shishtevec	200	1600	0	8
Borye	170	1200	0	7,1
Oreshek	40	200	0	5
Carnolevo	60	350	0	5,8
Pakishta	50	300	0	6
Zapod	750	4000	0	5,3
Ochikle	40	200	0	5
Orgosta	100	600	0	6
Kosharishte*	30	180	0	6
Poleto region				
Gorno Karchishta	42	112	188	7,1
Dolno Karchishta	60	0	342	5,7
Makelari	50	5	279	5,7

Oboki	40	0	228	5,7
Urbele	60	70	257	5,5
Deolyani	50	0	285	5,7
	Gollobordë region			
Sebishta	50	300	0	6
Steblevo	100	600	0	6
Klenjë	80	350	0	4,4
Ginovec	70	250	0	3,6
Trebishte	600	3500	0	5,8
Vorbica	42	520	0	12,4
Malo Ostreni	100	550	0	5,5
Golemo Ostreni	220	1550	0	7
Tuchepi	50	300	0	6
Vladimerica	100	600	0	6
Leshnichan**	120	720	0	6
Smolnik**	70	420	0	6
	Mala Prespa region			
Gorna Gorica	60	550	0	9,2
Dolna Gorica	7	70	0	10
Tuminec	40	400	0	10
Glombochani	42	400	0	9,5
Pustec	65	550	0	8,5
Shulin	32	300	0	9,4
Zarnovsko	15	130	0	8,7
Cerye	11	100	0	9,1
Leska	6	50	0	8,3
	Korçë region			
Boboshtica	260	1600	0	6,2
Drenovo	180	1080	0	6
	Kostur region			
Vrabnik	120	600	0	5
	Ohrid region			
Lin	100	700	No data	7
	Migrated to the inner parts of Albania			
Pogradec	50	300	-	6
Berat	No data	280	-	

Elbasan	No data	250	-	
Drach	No data	250	-	
Fjeri	No data	200	-	
Bilishta	35	150	-	4,3
Tirana	60	150	-	2,5
Korçë	35	150	-	4,3
Valona	No data	120	-	
Kruja	No data	60	-	
Other	No data	150	-	
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>27067</b>	<b>1579</b>	

**Source:** Eldarov, Sv. The Bulgarians in Albania 1913 – 1939. Research and documents (2000). Estimation made by the author of this book.

\* For the village of Kosharishte in the reports of Srebren Poppetrov and Dimitar Iliev no data is indicated. The number of houses and the number of population is estimated based on the average growth rate for the region of Gora in 1930 compared to 1912.

\*\* In the statistical data of Sr. Poppetrov for the villages Sebishta, Leshnichan, and Smolnik, only the number of houses is indicated. The number of residents is estimated based on the average household size in the region of Gollobordë.



Table 10

**Statistics of the Secret Service at the Ministry of Interior of the Kingdom of Albania from May, 1935 for the settlements, the number of houses and the people speaking Bulgarian in the prefectures Korçë and Debar**

Settlement	Orthodox		Muslim		Total	
	Houses	People	Houses	People	Houses	People
Vrabnik	83	402	0	0	83	402
Mala Prespa region						
Cerye	14	190	0	0	14	190
Pustec	74	596	0	0	74	596
Gorica	62	558	0	0	62	558
Shulin	39	531	0	0	39	531
Tuminec	46	303	0	0	46	303
Glombochani	39	409	0	0	39	409
Zarnovsko	16	154	0	0	16	154
Leska	10	93	0	0	10	93
Gollobordë region						
Vorbnica	40	192	0	0	40	192
Trebishte – hamlet Muchina	0	0	77	336	77	336
Trebishte – hamlet Chelebiya	5	30	73	816	78	846
Trebishte – upper hamlet	1	9	205	918	206	927
Ginovec	23	101	60	775	83	876
Klenjë	31	112	60	314	91	426
Stebervo	10	42	120	697	130	739
Golemo Ostreni	0	0	179	860	179	860
Malo Ostreni	14	69	103	537	117	606
Tuchepi	1	5	47	214	48	219
Vladimerica	0	0	82	380	82	380
Radovesh	0	0	64	284	64	284
Leshnichan	0	0	115	552	115	552
Smolnik	0	0	49	242	49	242
Poletë region						
Urbele	23	92	24	107	47	199
Gorno Karchishta	19	81	15	76	34	157
Mixed with Albanian population						
Pogradec	4	22	0	0	4	22
Lin	61	162	0	0	61	162
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>615</b>	<b>4153</b>	<b>1273</b>	<b>7108</b>	<b>1888</b>	<b>11261</b>

**Source:** AQSH, F. 152, V. 1935, D. 310, fl. 21.

Table 11

**Settlements in Albania inhabited by the Bulgarian Christians and the number of their houses in August, 1939 per their request to be allowed to use Bulgarian language in the local schools and churches**

<b>Name of the settlement</b>	<b>Number of houses</b>	<b>Signed representative</b>
<b>Poleto region</b>		
Karchishta	24	Alexo Kamburov
Urbele	15	Andrea Pepov
<b>Gollobordë region</b>		
Pasynky	12	Strezo Lumev
Malo Ostreni	14	Petre Novov
Varbica(Vorbnica)	40	Kuzman Strezov
Trebishta	6	Stamat Tarpchev
Ginevec	20	Georgi Iliev
Klenjë	28	Budin Petrov
Steblevo	9	Petre Stankov
<b>Ohrid region</b>		
Lin	20	Lambro Markulev
<b>Kostur region</b>		
Vrabnik	70	Nikola A. Pandovski
<b>Korçë region</b>		
Bilishta	30	Lambro Karanzha
<b>Mala Prespa region</b>		
Tumenec	40	Hristo Temelkov
Glombochani	45	Sotir Kaleshkov
Shulin	37	Goge Lambrov
Pustec	70	Todor Postalov
Leska	15	Lazo Traykov
Zarnovsko	20	Miag Sekula
Cerye	15	Fote Fotev
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>530</b>	<b>---</b>

**Source:** Eldarov, Sv. the Bulgarians in Albania 1913 – 1939. Research and documents (2000).

Table 12

**The number of population by ethnic belonging according to the population census taken in October, 1942 in the regions in Vardar Macedonia under Italian occupation and with Albanian administration**

Population		Debar prefecture	Tetovo prefecture	Tsarev Izvor	Total
Albanians	families	7 427	15 273	581	23 281
	men	19 973	51 138	1 761	72 872
	women	19 179	49 089	1 683	69 951
	total	39 152	100 227	3 444	142 823
Bulgarians	families	7 298	3 372	1 698	12 368
	men	21 905	9 407	5 454	36 766
	women	21 271	9 249	5 233	35 753
	total	43 402	18 656	10 687	72 745
Serbs	families	246	2 745	–	2 991
	men	740	8 980	–	9 720
	women	674	8 821	–	9 495
	total	1 414	17 801	–	19 215

**Source:** Panchev, A. Ethnic composition of the population of Western Macedonia during the Second World War according to official Albanian statistics (2018).

Table 13

**Number of people of Bulgarian descent, registered as Macedonians in Albania during the period 1945 – 1989**

Census year	Total population	Number of households	Average household size	Registered as Macedonians	
				Count	%
1945	1122044	196850	5,7	14400	1,28
1950	1218945	211613	5,76	2273	0,19
1955	1391499	251756	5,52	3341	0,24
1960	1626315	279805	5,81	4235	0,26
1979	2590600	463333	5,59	4097	0,16
1989	3182417	675456	4,71	4697	0,15

Table 14

**Number of people of Bulgarian descent living in Mala Prespa during the period 1945 – 1989**

Settlement	Number of resident by year				
	1945	1960	1969	1979	1989
Cerye	175	250	308	308	287
Pustec	565	697	788	941	1035
Dolna Gorica	149	108	210	271	253
Gorna Gorica	201	329	369	406	489
Shulin	398	265	320	371	464
Tuminec	289	448	515	587	661
Glombochani	346	217	239	252	299
Zarnovsko	201	247	307	317	322
Leska	84	149	157	182	215
TOTAL	2408	2710	3213	3635	4025

**Source:** Regional Strategy for Developing Sustainable Tourism in the Prespa Region with Special Attention to Ecological Tourism and Opportunities for its Development (2004).

Table 15

**Number of residents in the settlements in Albania, densely populated with people of Bulgarian descent according to partial administrative inquiries in 1993 and 1997 and population censuses taken in 2001 and 2011**

№	Settlement		Year/Number of residents		
	Bulgarian name (transliterated)	Albanian name	1993/1997*	2001	2011
Mala Prespa region					
1	Dolna Gorica	Dolna Gorica (Goricë e Vogël before 2013)	280	346	262
2	Gorna Gorica	Gorna Gorica (Goricë e Madhe before 2013)	490	527	475
3	Shulin	Shulin (Diellas before 2013)	520	499	405

4	Cerye	Cerje	296	281	40
5	Leska	Leska (Lajthize before 2013)	211	209	136
6	Pustec	Pustec (Liqenas before 2013)	1067	1030	806
7	Zarnovsko	Zrnosko (Zaroshkë before 2013)	331	333	314
8	Tuminec	Tuminec (Kallamas before 2013; Bezmisht before 1970)	600	668	565
9	Glombochani, Globocheni or Globochani	Gllloboçeni (Gollomboç before 2013)	211	259	159
	Total number of people of Bulgarian descent in the region		4006	4152	3162
Gollobordë region					
1	Steblevo	Stblevë	1000	89	117
2	Klenye	Klenjë	900	168	82
3	Trebishte	Trebisht	3800	1327	894
4	Malo Ostreni	Ostren i Vogël	6000	858	573
5	Golemo Ostreni	Ostren i Madh		1081	830
6	Pasynky	Pasnike		115	73
7	Ginovec	Gjinovec		427	282
8	Tuchepi	Tuçep		336	129
9	Vladimerica	Lladomericë		555	290
10	Konyovec	Kojavec		227	98
11	Radovesh	Radovesh		373	258
12	Orzhanov	Orzhanov		264	226
13	Leshnichan	Lejcan		412	272
14	Sebishta** Five hamlets: Karadzha, Kalichi, Ndreu, Bala, and Trampa	Sebisht		513	340
15	Vorbnica	Vërnice	40	29	12

	Total number of people of Bulgarian descent in the region		11740	6774	4476
Kukës Gora region					
1	Shishtavec (Shishtevec)	Shishtavec	1602	1276	848
2	Borye	Borje	1070	991	913
3	Oreshek	Oreshkë	535	466	393
4	Carnolevo	Cërnalevë	647	525	373
5	Orgosta	Orgjost	949	863	774
6	Kosharishte	Kosharisht	213	197	143
7	Zapod	Zapod	196	212	172
8	Pakishta	Pakisht	383	338	263
9	Ochikle	Orcikel	328	270	177
	Total number of people of Bulgarian descent in the region		5892	5138	4056
Separate villages with dense Bulgarian population					
1	Vrabnik		360	223	107
<b>Total residents of Bulgarian descent</b>			<b>21998</b>	<b>16287</b>	<b>11801</b>

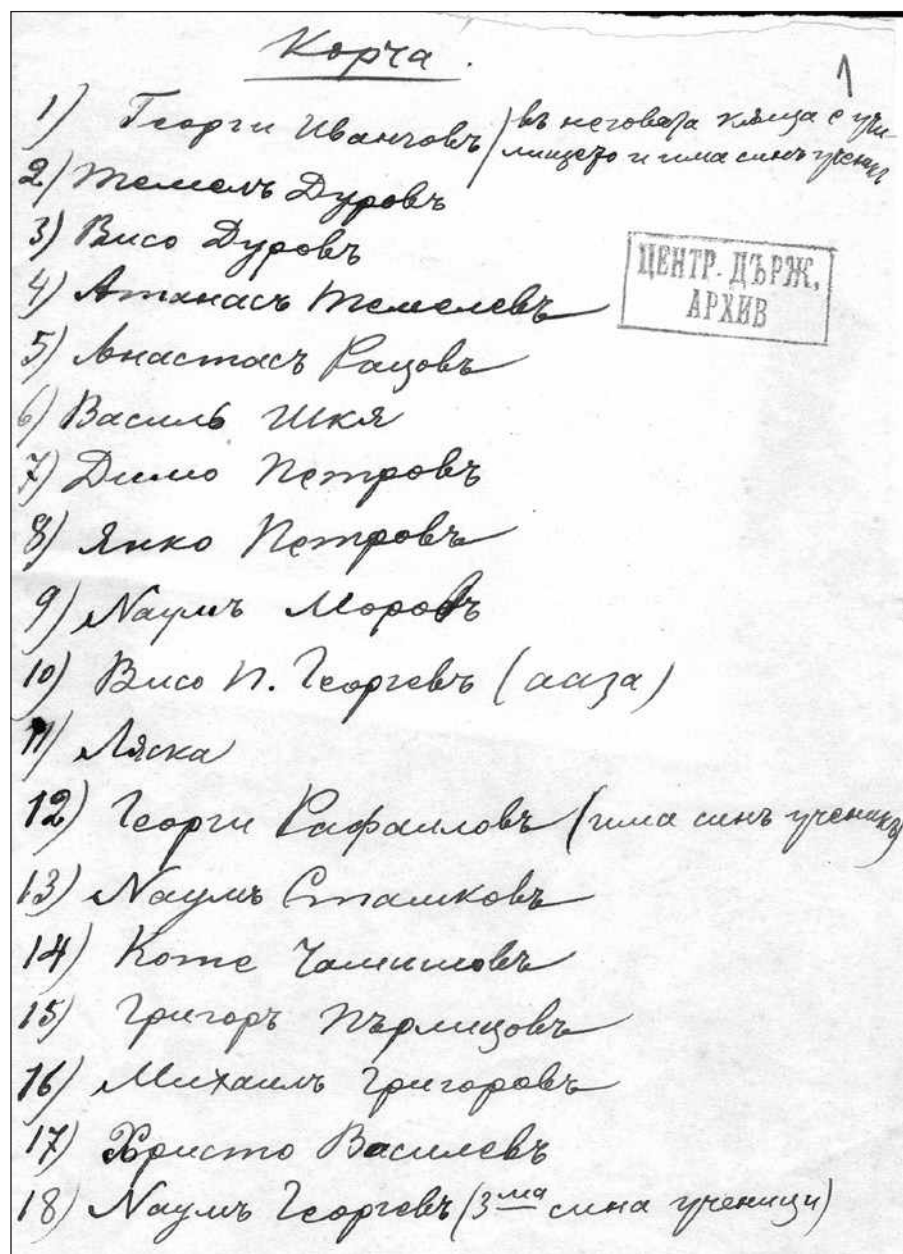
**Source:** Administrative inquiries of the village administrations (1993 and 1997) and the Institute of Statistics of Albania Instat (2018).

\* The data from 1993 are from Mala Prespa and Gollobordë, and from 1997 from Kukës Gora.

\*\* The data from 2011 for the residents of Bulgarian hamlets in the village of Sebishta are approximate, estimated using the number of inhabited houses and the average number of households in the area.

Facsimile 1

List of parents who sent their children to the Bulgarian school in Korçë, 19th century.



Source: Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 246K, i. 3, a.u. 27, p. 2.



# *Facsimile 2*

A part from the statistical publication from the population census taken in 1918 by the French administration in the Korçë autonomous district

**TABLEAU DES VILLAGES ADMINISTRÉS PAR LA FRANCE  
DANS LES CONFINES ALBANAIS**

Colonne 1. — Les indications qui suivent le nom du village indiquent la circonscription administrative.

1)

D. K. V. District de Korça (Koritza)-ville.  
D. K. C. — de Korça-campagne.  
D. B. — de Bilitsh.  
D. O. — de l'Ostrovica.  
D. T. — de la Tomorica.

TERRITOIRE DE KORÇA.

ZONE NEUTRE GRÉCO-ALBANAISE.

TERRITOIRE DE POGRADEC.

2)

Z. N. District de Pogradec.  
D. P. — de Pirk.  
D. S. — du Shkumbi.  
D. L. — du Lenja.

Les villages sont répartis par régions naturelles.

Colonne 4

Nature de la population.

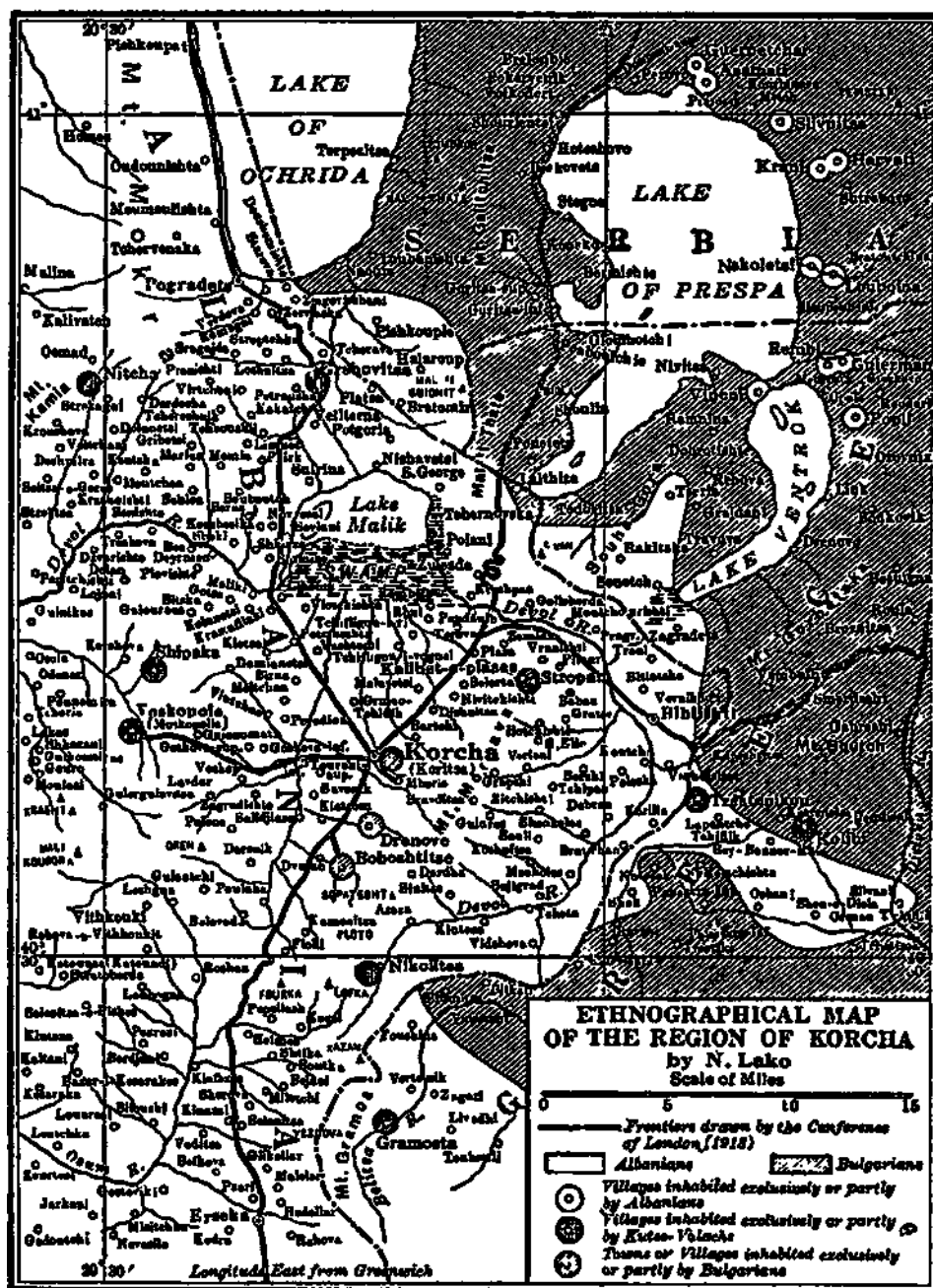
m Albanais musulmans.  
o — orthodoxes (c. o. crypto-orthodoxes).  
kv Koutro-Valaques (roumains).  
B Bulgares macédoniens.  
b Bulgares anciens (Drenovo et Boboshtina).

DÉNOMINATION	TRANSCRIPTION	NATURE	POPULATION		HABITATIONS		OBSERVATIONS
			NATIVES	ROMS / ÉTRANGERS	NATURELLES	ROMS / ÉTRANGERS	
Korça. District Koritza-ville (chef des services militaires).	Koritza	V	m + o + kv.	22545			Elzem et Gorica, d'anciens Korymbes, la ville la plus importante de l'Albanie; chef-lieu des confins albanais et du district Koritza-campagne. Site ancien sur le monticule.
PLAINE DE KORÇA (Fushë Koritza).							
Drenovo.....	Drenova.	v	o (B)	888	Vp	176	St. vill. des caravansérails, village bulgare en voie d'albanianisation.
Mbarja.....	Mbarja.	v	m + o	1003		105	Grecs anciens; ruines de Qytet; ancien haut fort.
Boboshtina.....	Boboshtina.	v	o (B)	1177		103	Région 450 maisons, g'd. d'Albanais, très ancien village avec ruines antiques. Quatre-vingts de très vieux maisons.
VILLAGES DE LA ZONE NEUTRE GRÉCO-ALBANAISE							
Dobroshitsa.	Dobroshitsa.	v	B		vi		
Gjerdan.	Gjerdan.	"	"		"		
Eysa.	Eysa.	"	"		"		
Nebizha.	Nebizha.	"	"		"		
Nalovo.	Nalovo (Orchovo).	"	"		"		
Zagradia.	Zagradia.	"	"		"		
Terna.	Terna.	"	"		"		
Qorja.	Qorja.	"	"		"		
Vinaia.	Vinaia.	"	m (alb.)		"		
Kivica.	Kivica.	"	ii		"		
Gjerdan.	Gjerdan.	"	"		"		
Lajtha.	Lajtha.	"	"		"		Détruit en 1916-17.
Pasica.	Pasica.	"	"		"		"
Elzen.	Elzen.	"	"		"		"
Gjerdan.	Gjerdan.	v	B		vi		"
Qorja.	Qorja.	"	B		"		"
Pograde.	Pograde.	"	roms et bulgares.		"		"
Korça.	Korça.	"	"		"		"
Trestina.	Trestina.	"	"		"		"
Koplikovo.	Koplikovo.	"	"		"		Chef-lieu. Détruit en 1915.

Source: Bourcart, J. Les confins albanais administrés par la France 1916-1920 (1922).

Facsimile 3

Ethnographic map of the region of Korçë from 1919



Source: Chekrezi, C. Albania, Past and Present (1919).

Facsimile 4

Certificate issued in 1923 to Georgi Poplazarov from the village of Vrabnik attesting he belongs to the Bulgarian ethnic minority

СМЕСЕНА КОМИСИЯ  
по  
ГРЪЦКО-БЪЛГАРСКОТО ИЗСЕЛВАНЕ  
ΛΙΚΤΗ ΕΠΙΤΡΟΠΗ  
— επί της  
Ελληνοβουλγαρικής Μεταγωγικής  
— — —

По силата на правилника по гръцко-българското изселване, освобождава се от всякакви такси и гербов налог.  
Ελευθέρου πάντος τέλους και τέλους χαρτοσήμου σύμφωνα τῷ Κανονισμῷ περί Ἑλληνοβουλγαρικής Μεταγωγικότητος.

Образец-формуляр № 2. А.  
Πρωτοδικα 66/3909. 2. Α.

**ΣВИДЕТЕЛСТВО ЗА ΕΘΝΙΚΕΣΚΟ ΜΑΛΛΙΝΕΣΤΒΟ**  
за кандидат-емигрант  
**ΠΙΣΤΟΠΟΙΗΤΙΚΟΝ ΜΕΛΟΥΣ ΦΥΛΕΤΙΚΗΣ ΜΕΙΟΝΟΤΗΤΟΣ**  
δὲ βουλγαρικοῦ ματανώτου;

Подписания, имен на Βερεκλίου Федерин  
(Ὁ ὑπογράφωντες ἀνταρχὴς τοῦ νομοῦ

удостоверявам с настоящето, че)  
πιστοποιῶ δὲ τὸν παρόντος ἐπὶ)

е жител на общината ни)  
ἐνταῦθα κατοικῶν τὸν ἐπαρὸν δήμον)

че е)  
καὶ ἐπὶ κτήματα τῆς)

Βερεκλίου, Κατωρίας, Федерин  
Εδрикίου поданик и че по народност е)  
(Μακεδονικῶν, ἀπὸ τῆς δὲ φυλετικῆς εἰς τῆς)

Κουζαρίν — — — — —

Настоящото свидетелство му се издава безплатно, за да му послужи пред Смесената Комисия по гръцко-българското изселване или пред нейните представители.

Τὸ παρὶν πιστοποιητικὸν ἐκδίδεται ἀπὸ τὸν βουλευτὴ καὶ τῷ ὑπογράφοντι παρὰ τοῦ Μικτοῦ Ὑπουργοῦ ἐπὶ τῆς Ἑλληνοβουλγαρικῆς Μεταγωγικότητος ἢ τοῦ νεώτερου αὐτοῦ ἀνταρχῆ.

Гр. (с) Βερεκλίου 12-9-1923 год.  
Εν.

Кмет:  
(Ὁ ἀνταρχὴς: Παυλὸς Κασαρίν)

Секретар на общината:  
(Печат на общината)

(Ὁ βουλευτὴς ὑπογράφει:  
(Τ. Ε. τοῦ Δήμου)

ἢ ἴσως, презиме и всички нужни означения, за да не бъде просител изет за друго лице.  
ἢ Да се посочи сегашния пълнел адрес на просителя.  
ἢ Да се посочи поданицството на просителя. — Понежъ поданицството е един важен елемент за определяне

Source: Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 719K, i. 5, a.u. 1466, p. 6.

*Facsimile 5*

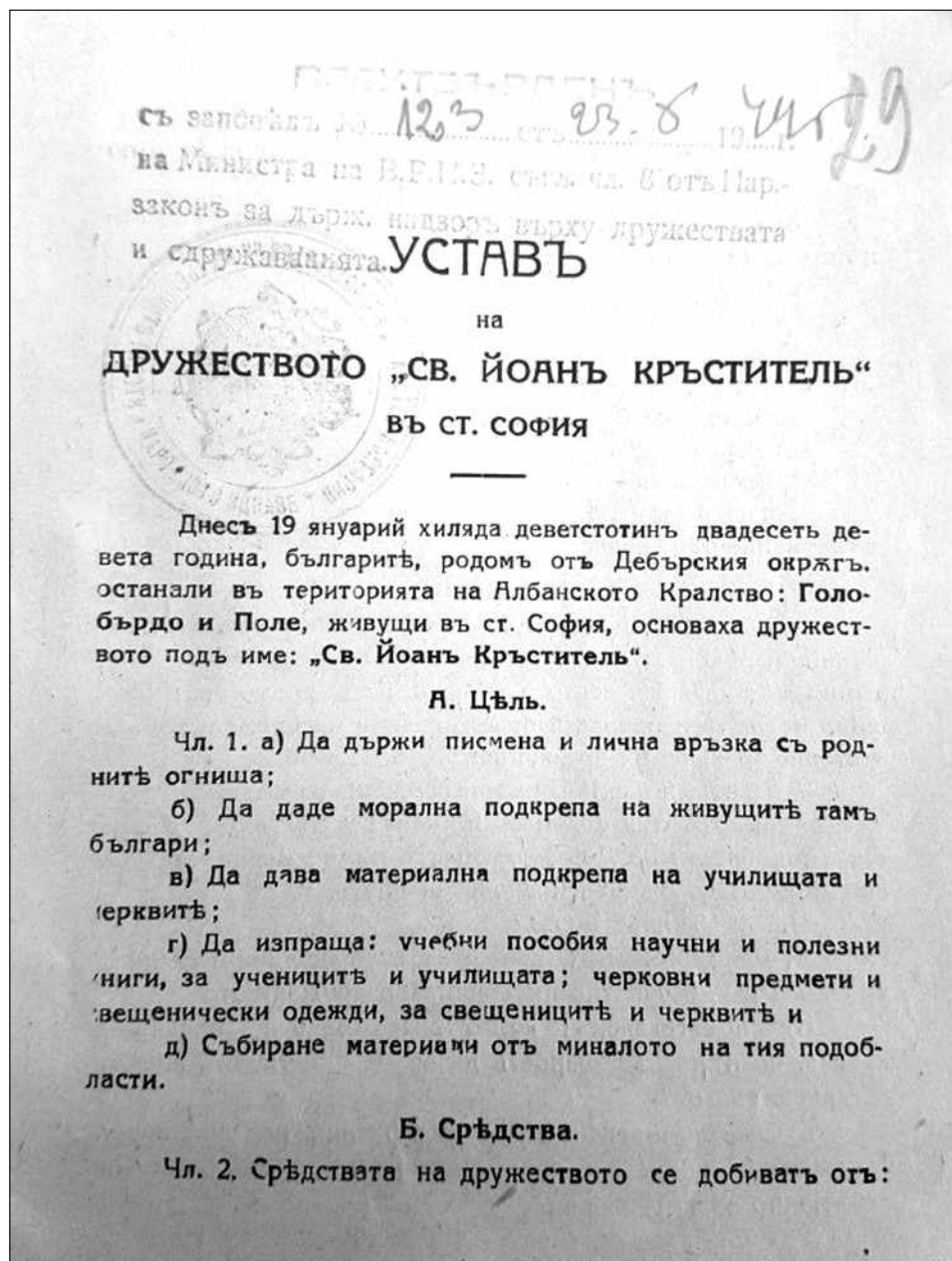
**Inscription on the outside wall above the front door of the temple  
„Saint Nicholas“ in the village of Ginovec, Gollobordë, built in 1911**



Source: Photo by the author of this book.

*Facsimile 6*

**Charter of the association „Saint John the Baptist“, founded by Bulgarians from the Debar district, who remained on the territory of the Albanian kingdom: Gollobordë and Pole (1929)**





6

PROTOCOLE FINAL.

I.

Conformément à la résolution votée par la deuxième Conférence Balkanique à Stamboul, les Délégations Albanaise et Bulgare, réunies à Sofia, ont échangé des vues sur l'application des traités concernant les minorités et se sont entendues sur ce qui suit :

1° La Délégation Albanaise reconnaît l'existence d'une minorité bulgare en Albanie.

2° La Délégation Bulgare reconnaît l'existence d'une minorité albanaise en Bulgarie.

3° La Délégation Albanaise prend l'engagement d'intervenir auprès de son Gouvernement afin de procéder à l'ouverture d'écoles bulgares dans les villes et villages où la population bulgare prédomine. Dans ces écoles l'enseignement sera donné en langue bulgare et la langue albanaise sera obligatoire.

D'autre part, dans les écoles albanaises fréquentées par un nombre suffisant d'élèves bulgares, le groupe Albanais s'engage à entreprendre auprès de qui de droit des démarches pour que la langue bulgare pour les élèves bulgares soit introduite dans ces établissements.

De son côté, la Délégation Bulgare prend l'engagement d'intervenir auprès de son Gouvernement pour que ce dernier procède à l'ouverture d'écoles albanaises dans toute localité où l'élément albanais prédomine. Dans ces écoles, l'enseignement sera donné en langue albanaise et la langue bulgare sera obligatoire.

Dans les écoles bulgares fréquentées par un nombre suffisant d'élèves albanaise, le groupe bulgare s'engage à faire des démarches auprès de qui de droit pour que la langue albanaise pour les élèves albanaise soit introduite dans ces écoles.

-/-

Final protocol for the recognition of the Bulgarian minority  
in Albania, 9.01.1932, page 2

4° En ce qui concerne les églises bulgares situées en territoire albanais, la solution de cette question sera remise à une date ultérieure.

5° Les deux délégations susmentionnées s'obligent mutuellement d'entreprendre les démarches nécessaires auprès de qui de droit pour obtenir le libre échange de toute sorte de publications, sauf celles prohibées par les lois respectives dans les deux pays.

II.

Les deux Délégations - Albanaise et Bulgare - s'engagent à intervenir auprès de leurs gouvernements respectifs afin qu'ils procèdent au plus tôt à la conclusion d'un pacte d'unité, d'arbitrage et de non-agression.

III.

Les mêmes Délégations s'engagent également à faire des démarches auprès de leurs gouvernements respectifs afin qu'ils procèdent, en temps opportun, à la conclusion d'un traité de commerce. Entre-temps, elles expriment le vœu que des mesures appropriées soient prises pour faciliter l'échange des produits et des marchandises provenant des deux pays.

Délégué Albanais.

1. *Mehmed Kunitza*

Délégué Bulgare

1. *Ivan Todoroff*

2. *Andar' Todoroff*

Sofia, le 9 janvier 1932.



**Part of the request sent to the Bulgarian Legation in Tirana  
on September 2nd, 1932, by the mayor and the elders of the village  
of Gorna Gorica**



Article in the Belgrade newspaper „Vreme“ from April 23rd, 1933, about the expulsion of the residents of the village of Gorna Gorica in Albania to Yugoslavia

ЈЕДАН СЈАЈНИ ДЕМАНТИ БУГАРСКОЈ ТЕЗИ О ОБОЖЊЕЊЕМ  
ПОСТОЈАЊУ БУГАРСКИХ МАЊИНА У АЛБАНИЈИ

## Два цела села из Албаније, чији су становници били вођени као припадници бугарске мањине, прелазе у Југославију изјав- љујући да су они чисти Југословени

Узалудни покушај бугарског отпраника послова у Тирани г. Мин-  
чева да наговори становнике ова два села да се одсеље у Бугарску

Ресан, 22 априла. — (Специјал-  
ни извештај „Времена“). — И-  
спод Корче, југословенске грани-  
це, према сектору Ресан — Битољ,  
налазе се два села Горица и Гом-  
боч, чији су становници: 56 поро-  
дица са 505 душа изјавили жељу  
арбанској влади, да им дозволи, да  
могу прећи у Југославију у циљу  
сталног настањена, осећајући се  
у националном погледу правим Ју-  
гословенима. Становници ових се-  
ла били су у тако званом колонат-  
ском односу према сопственику и  
мања на коме су они живели и ра-  
дили.

Садашњи сопственик помену-  
тих села, Малић Бег Фрашели, до  
био је у посед ово имање пре 30  
година одлуком битолског суда.  
Пре годину дана он је известио  
становништво поменутих села, да  
прекида кметиски однос који по-  
стоји између њега као сопствени-  
ка тих имања и њих.

Чувши за њихову жељу, да се  
насеље у Југославију, бугарски от-  
праник послова у Тирани Минчо  
Минчев дошао је 18 о. м. у Гори-  
цу и наговарао сељаке овог ме-  
ста, да се не селе у Југославију,  
него у Бугарску, де ће их тамош-  
ње власти дочекати као праву бра-  
ћу, јер их сматра да су они били  
на те крајеве.

Акција овог дипломатског чи-  
новника није успела да убеди ста-  
новнике Горице и Гомбача, који  
су енергично изјавили, да се осе-  
ћају душом прави Југословени,  
као Југословени који живе у Ју-  
гославији и да желе да се наста-  
не у Метохији. И тако, 22 о. м.  
они прелазе нашу границу и од-  
лазе у Источни срез Вардарског  
бановине, где су им додељени  
земље, као и куће са потребним  
алатима и справама за обрађива-  
ње земље.

У коликој су се мери бугарске  
претензије изјавиле док је  
тај, што ови становници веће да  
чују о бугарској мањини, а ако  
је у своје време био закључен из  
роцити протокол између бугарске  
и арбанашке делегације на Бал-  
канској конференцији у Царигра-  
ду о признавању релативних  
мањина у Албанији и Бугарској,  
по коме су становници ова два  
села били третирани као припад-  
ници бугарске мањине у Албани-  
ји. Као што се види, национална  
свест поред расне, језичне и вер-  
ске припадности, победила је ов-  
де бугарску тезу о тобожњем по-  
стојању бугарских мањина у Ал-  
банији, као и у Југославији.

Statistics of the General Directorate of Renovation for the number of  
Bulgarians in Albania, 1935

175

Повъртено.

№ 8382-30 I  
6. IV 1935.

До Главната Дирекция на Обновата  
Отд. Национално Възпитание.  
Т у ж ъ .

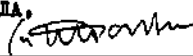
На № 111 отъ 3.IV.1935 година.

Министерството на Външните Работи и на Импровидианята,  
при невъзможност да изпрати поканата препишка приехта въ дѣло,  
предава по-долу описъка на въпросните села само за сведение на  
Главната Дирекция.

Тѣзи сведения сѣ събрани отъ бившия инспекторъ-организаторъ  
на учебното дѣло за българските малцинства въ Албания г. Сребренъ  
Попъ Петровъ.

1. Область Мала Преспа - 11 села .....	3.550 души	
2. Область Гого Бърдо и Поле - Дебърско около 100 села .....	12.000	"
3. о. с. Бидица, Врѣбникъ и Прогои - Бидицка околия .....	950	"
4. с. с. Бобешница и Дръново - Корчанска околия ..	2.800	"
5. Село Липъ - Подградецка околия .....	600	"
6. Область "Гора" - Северните склонове на Шаръ планина .....	8.500	"
7. Бератска околия .....	250	"
8. Гр. Тирана .....	200	"
9. Гр. Дурацо .....	250	"
10. Гр. Кавая .....	60	"
11. Гр. Елбасанъ .....	120	"
12. Подградецъ .....	100	"
13. Корча .....	200	"
14. Фieri и околността .....	70	"
15. Авлона .....	120	"
16. Шкодра .....	150	"
17. Прѣзиденти, некадирени и непровѣрени .....	965	"


Отъ тѣзи българи около 10 до 12 хиляди сѣ православни и  
19 - 20 хиляди мохамедани.

ЗА НАЧАЛНИКЪ НА ОТДѣЛА,  
ПЪРВИ СЕКРЕТАРЪ: 

Source: Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 176, i. 5, p. 175.

# Facsimile 11

Statistics of the Secret Service at the Ministry of Interior of the Kingdom of Albania from May, 1935 about the settlements, the number of houses, and the people speaking Bulgarian



MBËTETIJA SHQIPTARE  
MINISTRIA E P. TE MBRENDOSHME  
ZYRA SEKRETE

Tiranë, më 193

Nr.        Listë e katundeve ku ka bullgarofonë


Prefektura e Korçës

Vendi	ORTHODHOKSE		MUSLIMANË		GJITHSHËJ	
	shtëpi	frëmë	shtëpi	frëmë	shtëpi	frëmë
Verniku	83	402			83	402
Lands:						
Gorja	14	190			14	190
Pesteci	74	596			74	596
Gorica	62	558			62	558
Shulini	39	531			39	531
Damshiti	46	303			46	303
Gllomboci	39	409			39	409
Zaroshka	16	154			16	154
Lajthisa	10	93				
<b>Prof. e Dibres</b>						
Verniku	40	192			40	192
Trebishtë)			77	336	77	336
Mugino						
Trebishtë)	5	30	73	816	78	846
Qelapi						
Trebishtë) Rper 1		9	205	918	206	927
Gjanovec	23	101	62	778	63	876
Klenjë	31	112	60	314	91	426
Steblovë	10	42	120	697	130	739
Ostreni Madh)		122				
"			179	860	179	860
Ostreni Vogel	14	66	103	537	117	606
Tuçep	1	5	47	214	48	219
Llademirioë		22	82	390	82	390
Radovesh			64	284	64	284
Lejçan			115	552	115	552
Shanllenik			49	242	49	242
Herbel	23	92	24	107	47	199
Kercishtë)						
Rper }	19	81	15	76	34	157
				96		

V.O. Ne Pogradec janë shtëpi 4 me frëmë 22 )ku elementi shqyptar asht ne 6 dhe ne Lin( " ) " 61 mm " 162)shumicë.

**Shenim.** Myslimant e çarkut Dibres ne gjith se janë bullgarofonë konsideroj në votin si Shqyptarë dhe nuk duen te konsiderohen si pakicë bullgare.

Korçë 3143  
Diber 7641  
Pogradec 184  
Gjith 10.968



AQSH F. 152 V. 1935 D. 310 fl. 21

Source: AQSH, F. 152, V. 1935, D. 310, fl. 21.

Facsimile 12

Decision 3 from August, 13th 1942 of the District committee at the city of Korçë regarding Kosta Tsvetkov, interned by the police, registered as a Macedonian, and the deed for which he is being punished to internment for one year, namely that he „is a dangerous person and spreads propaganda for the benefits of Bulgaria“. His surname is changed to Tsvetko.

VENDIM

Nr. 3 datë 13 Gusht 1942 KK.

Komisjoni i Qarkut të Korçës për internime policore i formuar si  
mbas nenit 142 të Kodit të Policisë.

Sot me datën tremdhjet Gusht njëmijandëqint e dyzet e dy ditën e Enj-  
te në sallën e Prefekturës Korçës Komisioni i mbledhur nën Kryesinë e Pre-  
fektit Z. Tafil Buletini me antarë Z. Dr. Nikollag Kotte Inspektor i P.K.F.  
SH. Zef Bonussi Prokuror i Mbretit, Subi Topulli Kuestor i Korçës, Major  
Kol Radovani shtendës Komandant i Grupit KK. dhe i asistues prej Surja  
Çami N/Komiser i S.B. e me cilsi si sekretar i Komisionit, mori në shqyr-  
tim praktikën e referueme prej Kuesturës së kotusime Nr. 01143 dat 4/8/1942  
që ban fjalë rreth sjelljeve të Kostas Svetko-s i biri i Jorgjit e i Len-  
kës, vjeç 25, lindur e banues në Carat-Dvor N/Prefekturë e Praspës, maqedhon  
nënshetës Shqiptar; i cili asht një person i rrenikshëm dhe alarmues  
për propagandën në favor të Bullgarisë dhe në dam të interesave të Shtetit  
t'omë, dhe si rezultat konstatoj rrenikshmenin e të përmendurit për sigu-  
rim botuer dhe një saniti;

V E N D O S I

Internimin policuer për një kohë prej një vjetë. nënshetës.

Ky vendim i paraqitet P.T. Ministrisë së P. të Brendshme për aprovim de-  
finitiv dhe caktimin e vendit ku do të vuaj internimin policor i përmën-  
duri me sipër të ju komunikue Zyra të S.B. dhe të interesuemit për me-  
dorue fakultetin e rekursit të parapamë prej Nenet 143 të Kodit në fja-  
lë.

Ky vendim si u lexua nënshkruhet prej të gjithëve.

P. Kryetari	Antar	Antar	Antar
( Tafil Buletini )	( Dr. Nikollag Kotte )	( Zef Bonussi )	( Subi Topulli )

Antar			
( Kol Radovani )			

Sekretar i Komisionit  
N/Komiser i S.B.  
( Surja Çami )

Source: Bulgarian Central State Archive, f. 176K, i. 15, a.u. 27, p. 54.



Facsimile 13

Spelling-book for first grade for the Macedonian schools in Mala Prespa and the village of Vrabnik, Albania, written on Bulgarian Prespa dialect with Bulgarian alphabet, published in Tirana in 1969



Source: Spelling-book for 1st grade. Shtëpia botuese e librit shkollor. Tirana (1969)

*Facsimile 14*

**Bulgarian folklore song from the village of Steblevo written with Albanian alphabet (on the left) by F. Hoxha from the Institute of Folklore in Tirana in 1960. Transliterated with the Bulgarian alphabet (on the right) by Miranda Belo.**

<b>Shetat mise dete axhamija</b>	<b>Шетат ми се дете аджамия</b>
Shetat mise dete axhamija Shetat mise iz mermer avlija: roce dorzhit u beli xheboi. gillava dorzhit u surova zemja. Go opitvet negovata majka: -Oj ti dete, dete axhamija sho se shetash iz mermer avlija? Roce dorzhish u beli xheboi. gillava dorzhish u surova zemja, -Oj ti nane, nane milla nane! Pristanale turci anadolci, Pobarale babovi borxhoi -Oj ti dete, dete axhamija, promenija ubava neveta, istajsija na bolluk pazara pobaraje edna teshka cena. Ja promena dete axhamija. Ja istaje na bolluk pazara. Go opitvet dete axhamija:	Шетат ми се дете аджамия шетат ми се из мермер авлия: роце доржит у бели джебон. глава доржит у сурова земя. Го опитвет неговата майка: -Ой ти дете, дете аджамия шо се шеташи из мермер авлия? Роце доржиши у бели джебон. глава доржиши у сурова земля, -Ой ти нане, нане мила нане! Пристанале турци анадолици. Побарале бабови борджон -Ой ти дете, дете аджамия. промени я убава невеста, истайси я на болук пазара Побарайе една тешка цена. Я промена дете аджамия, Я истае на болук пазара. Го опитвет дете аджамия:

Source: Arkivi i Institutit të Folklorit, F. Hoxha, flet.VII, f. 3-4, Tirana; Belo, M. A folklore song from the village of Steblevo (Albania) (2004).



Facsimile 15

Parts of a letter from the Association of builders „Gollobordë“  
and the construction company „Gollobordë“ sent to Spas Tashev.  
Elbasan, July, 10th 1994

Elbasan 10. 07. 1994 (113)

GOSPODIN SPAS

NA VREMETO SHTO ODEV NA POSHIA DATI PUSHTA PISMA KE TI  
PISHA ENI PROBLEMI OT DRUZHUVATA IMOTATA FIRMA "GOLLOBORDA".  
~~KE TI DAVAM ZEMEN DAVASH EDEN DRUGI GOLEM PROBLEM NI~~  
XHAFER. VIE KAKO CERKVA MAKEDONKA NE MOITE DA JA  
PRAVITE ZASHTO TAJA ESTI BUGARCKA CERKVA I CERKVATA OT  
SOFIA NI JA IMAT DAVENO NAMI - NA GOSPODIN XHEVAHIR  
BEKTESHI SHTO ESTI DIREKTOR NA PRIVATNA FIRMA "GOLLOBORDA",  
DA JA PRAVIT. TOJ IMAT ZAFATEHO RABOTA TUEKA. NA CERKVATA.  
OT SFETI TON VLADIMIR.

GOSPODIN SPAS

JAS MISLAM OVIE RABOQE SHTO SE PRAVET SE ORGANIZIRANI  
MILDOGU VARVO I INTENSIVNO OT STRANA MAKEDONKA.

NA OVAJ MOMENT JAS IM REKOV NA POPDITE OT MAKEDONIA  
SHTO CERKVITE V'GOLLOBORDO, VO VERNIK I OVAJA V'ELBASAN  
SHTO SE BUGARCKI CERKVI LINE MAKEDONCKI DA I PRAIT DRUZHUVATO  
GOLLOBORDO I PRIVATNATA FIRMA GOLLOBORDO.

PODITE MI REKOJE SHTO NARODOT I CELLO GOLLOBORDO ESTI  
NAROT I MESTO MAKEDONCKO.

JAS IM REKOV NA POPOVITE: VIE IMATE ZGRESHENO ADRESA ZA  
NARODOT V'GOLLOBORDO, ZASHTO JAZIKOT SHTO ZBOJUT OVAJ NAROD  
ESTI BUGARCKI JAZIK I NE MAKEDONCKI. ZATE MOITE DA SI DOITE  
OT NESHTO SVE OATJEMI. SO DLKU SE ~~SE~~ ODELIVME SO POPOVITE

GOSPODIN XHAFER

SOFIE I DA VIDIME TAMU KAKU DA SE PRAVIT.

VIE SAKAT DANI PUSHTITE ALI DA GO ZEMATE NA TELEFON  
GOSPODIN XHAFER KOLKU PO BURBU KAKO DA PRAVIME.

1. KONTAKT OT OTORUZENIJA



DIREKTOR NA FIRMA "GOLLOBORDO"  
XHEVAHIR BEKTESHI

Source: Personal archive of S. Tashev.

**Deciphering parts of a letter from the Association of builders „Gollobordë“ and the construction company „Gollobordë“ sent to Spas Tashëv. Elbasan, July, 10th 1994**

Original text on a Gollobordë dialect written with the Albanian alphabet	Transcription to Bulgarian Cyrillic	Adaptation to Bulgarian literary language
<p>...Vie kako cërkvja maqidonska ne moite da ja pravite zashto taja esti bugarska cërkvja...</p> <p>Na ovja moment jas im rekov na popoite ot Makedonija shto cërkvite v Gollo Bordo, vo Vrabnik i ovaja v Elbasan shto se bugarski cërkvj i ne makedonski...</p> <p>Jas im rekov na popovite: Vie imate zgreshe-no adresa za narodot v Gollo Bordo, zashto jazikot shto zborit ovja narod esti bugarski jazik i ne makidonski. Zate moite da si odite ot ke shto ste dojdëni...</p>	<p>...Вие како църква макидонска не мойте да я правите защо тая ести бугарска църква...</p> <p>На овя момент яс им реков на попоите от Macedonia що църквите в Голо Бордо, во Върник and овая в Елбасан що се бугарски църкви and не Macedonian...</p> <p>Яс им реков на поповите: Вие имате згрешено адреса за народот в Голо Бордо, защо езикот що зборит овя народ ести бугарски език and не макидонски. Зате моите да си одите от ке що сте дойдени...</p>	<p>...Вие като църква македонска недейте да я правите, защото тази е българска църква...</p> <p>На този момент аз им рекох на поповете от Македония, че църквите в Голо Бърдо, във Върбник и тази в Елбасан, че са български църкви и не македонски...</p> <p>Аз им рекох на поповите: Вие сте сгрешили адреса на народа в Голо Бърдо, защото езика, който говори този народ, е български език, а не македонски. Затова можете да си ходите от където сте дошли...</p>

Translation in English:

...You cannot say this is a Macedonian church, because it is a Bulgarian church...

At that moment, I told the priests from Macedonia that the churches in Gollobordë, Vrabnik, and the one in Elbasan are Bulgarian churches, not Macedonian...

I said to the priests: You have come to the wrong address as we, the people from Gollobordë, speak Bulgarian, and not Macedonian. That is why you can go back where you came from...

Facsimile 16

Letter from 1994 by Adrian Fetahu sent to the minister of education of Republic of Bulgaria, in which he states that his „mother tongue is Bulgarian“. The personal data in the facsimile is erased.


ДО ГОСПОДИНОТ  
МИНИСТЕР ЗА ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ  
И НАУКА НА РЕПУБЛИКА  
БЪЛГАРИЯ

МОЛБА

ОТ АДРИАН ФАИК ФЕТАХУ

ГОСПОДИН МИНИСТЕР,  
КЪСНО РАЗБРАВ ЗА КОНКУРСОТ  
ПО БЪЛГАРСКИ ЕЗИК КОЈ ТРЕБАШЕ  
ДА СЕ ПРОВЕДЕ НА ТИРАНА, И ЗАТО  
НЕ МОЖАВ ДАГО ПОСЕТАМ.  
ВИСЕ МОЛАМ ДАМЕ ИЗВЕСТИТЕ КАКО  
МОЖАМ СЕГА ДА СТАНАМ СТУДЕНТ  
ВО БЪЛГАРИЈА.  
МОЈОТ МАЈЧИН ЈАЗИК ЕСТИ БЪЛГАРСКИ.  
СЕ ИНТЕРЕСУВАМ ЗА СПЕЦИАЛНОСТЕ:  
1) ТЕХНИЧЕСКИ ИНЖЕНЕР (МЕХАНИКЕР)  
2) БЪЛГАРСКА ФИЛОЛОГИЈА.  
3) КОНСЕРВАТОРИЈА (НАРОДНА МУЗИКА)

ИМАМ ЗАВРШЕНО СРЕДНО МЕХАНИЧНО  
УЧИЛИШТЕ (ТЕХНИКУМ) СО УСПЕХ  
СРЕДНО 6.  
ДИПЛОМАТА ЌЕЈА ПРЕСТАВАМ ПО КЪС-  
НО.  
НАДЕВАМ СЕ ШТО ЌЕ ДОБИЈАМ ПОЗИТИ-  
ВЕН ОДГОВОР.

СО ГОЛЕМ РЕСПЕКТ: 

ЕЛБАСАН 8.07.1994

Source: Personal archive of S. Tashev.





Spas Tashev graduated from the University of National and World Economy with a degree in International Economic Relationships. He studied the basics of diplomacy at the Bulgarian Diplomatic Institute at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He has a

PhD in Demography and Statistics at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

Former vice-president of the State Agency for Bulgarians Abroad and founder and first director of the Cultural Information Center of the Republic of Bulgaria in Skopje.

Associate Professor at the Institute for Population and Human Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, specializing in various aspects of international migration flows, the Bulgarian communities abroad, the rescue of the Bulgarian Jews in the years of the Second World War, etc. Member of the editorial team of the magazine "Geopolitics". Chief expert associate at the Parliamentary Committee for Policies concerning Bulgarians Abroad.

Author and co-author of multiple publications, collections and monographs. His study "Migration Pressure on Bulgaria 2008 - 2017. Manifestation and Consequences" was announced by the Research Council of the Management Board of BAS for a monograph of national importance for 2018.

